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# *The* PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 64 NUMBER 4

JULY/AUGUST 1983







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# The PALIMPSEST

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Adrian D. Anderson, Executive Director

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Mary K. Fredericksen, Editor

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Cover: Grant Miller and Normand Patton were two of the leading architects involved in designing Carnegie libraries in Iowa in the early twentieth century. In this issue of the Palimpsest Paul Kruty examines their contributions to the Iowa urban scene. (cover artwork by Kirk M. Johnson)



## The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

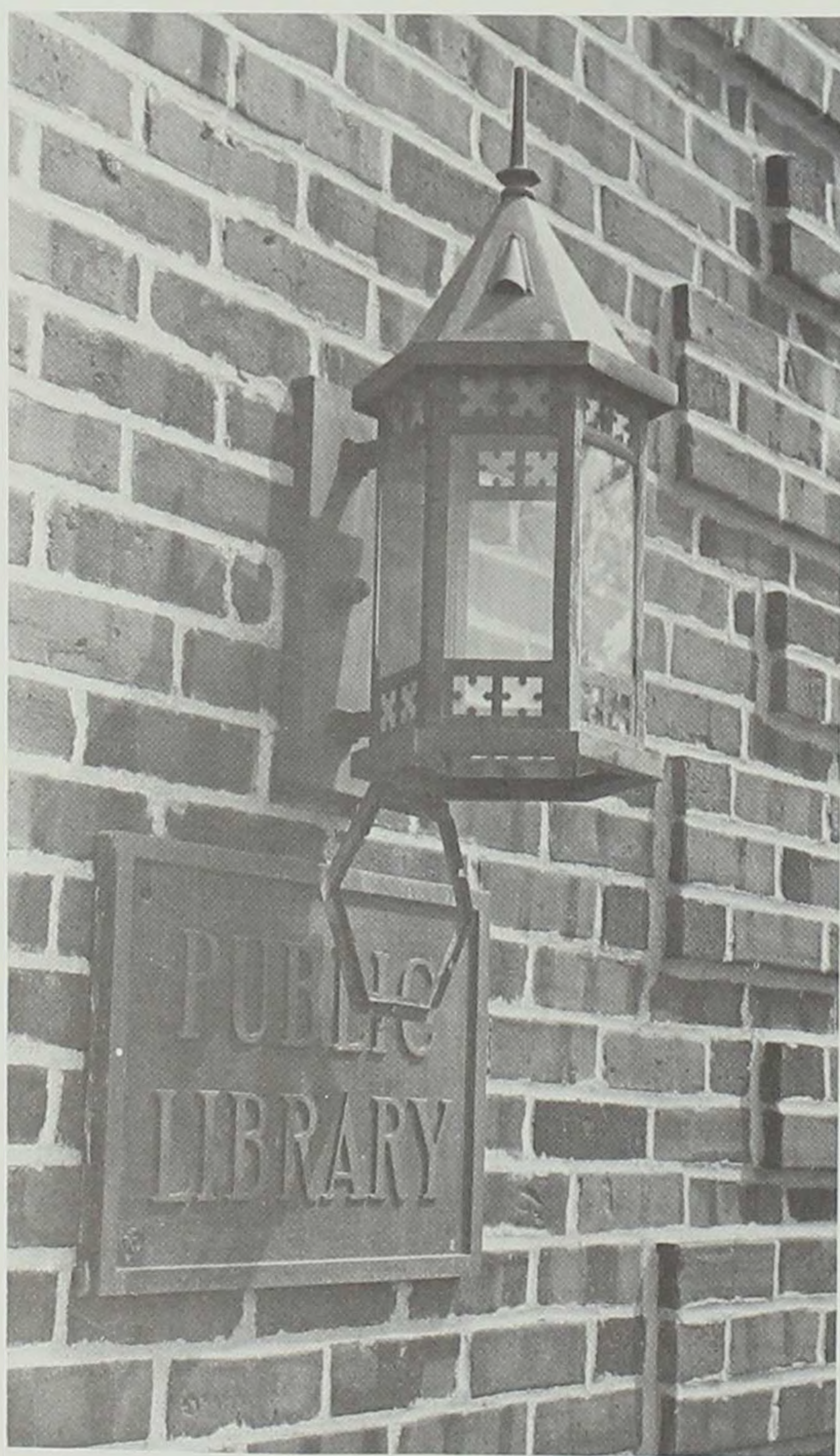
The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.



# Patton and Miller: Designers of Carnegie Libraries

by Paul Kruty

*The public library is an ancient institution, but when it came under the influence of the intense activity of the latter part of the nineteenth century, it received such an extraordinary expansion and such a revolution of methods as to make it almost a new creation.*



*Entryway lamp at the 1903 Vinton Public Library (photographed by Hans Muessig and Sarah Dennett for the ISHD, Historic Preservation)*

Thus began architect Grant Miller in "Library Buildings," a paper presented before the Iowa Library Association at Grinnell in 1902. His Chicago architectural firm, Patton and Miller, had recently received the first of its numerous commissions for libraries in Iowa—and was establishing its reputation as one of the major designers of Carnegie libraries. By 1909 libraries designed by Patton and Miller dotted the state from Muscatine to Council Bluffs, and from Mason City to Chariton.

The driving force behind these "new creations" was Andrew Carnegie and his Carnegie Corporation of New York. Miller and his partner, Normand Patton, designed over one hundred of the 1679 Carnegie library buildings erected between 1886 and 1919. These prolific architects received their commissions mostly from Midwestern towns and colleges, but they occasionally designed libraries as far away as Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Lake Charles, Louisiana. A sixth of the nearly one hundred Carnegie libraries built in Iowa were designed by Patton and Miller.

The public library, supported by either state or local government, dates to the founding of the Boston Public Library in 1848. Within a quarter century most American cities had public libraries of some sort. The emergence of the professional librarian followed almost immedi-

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*The cover of Harper's Weekly for 30 March 1901 recognized Andrew Carnegie's role as a financier of public libraries.*

ately. The American Library Association distributed the first issue of the *Library Journal* at the Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia in 1876, while the first American library school was founded in 1884 by Melvil Dewey at Columbia University.

Andrew Carnegie witnessed this slow rise of

the public library as an institution. Early in his extraordinary life, Carnegie wrote of the obligation of the wealthy to use their surplus income to benefit fellow citizens (eventually he gave away ninety percent of his own wealth). Carnegie had definite ideas about how the money should be dispersed. In an essay titled



"The Best Fields for Philanthropy," he listed libraries as second only to universities among seven areas worthy of donation by the wealthy. True to his word, Carnegie eventually spent forty million dollars constructing library buildings in the United States.

After 1898, when the mechanics for receiving money were reorganized, a typical library grant would start with a local individual writing a letter to the Carnegie Corporation. James Bertram, Carnegie's personal secretary, would then explain the three conditions that had to be met before a grant was made: the town would have to supply the library site, the city council would have to pledge itself to an annual maintenance agreement (ten percent of the total amount of the Carnegie grant would have to be spent each year by the community to maintain the library), and, after 1908, a sketch plan of the proposed building indicating a workable library plan would have to be approved. All communication was done by mail and the correspondence about a particular building was often voluminous.

Almost half the Carnegie libraries were built in the Midwest. At the turn of the century many New England towns had either privately financed or state supported libraries, while vast areas of the West were not sufficiently settled to require libraries. Thus the Chicago architectural firm found itself swamped with orders for libraries. As Normand Patton wrote to the Washington, Indiana, library board in late 1901, "It so happens that just now we are called in so many directions at once to make visits of superintendence to various library buildings, that all the time of both members of the firm will be taken up the next week and it would be hardly possible for any one of us to visit Washington." Before the Carnegie money became readily available, commissions for libraries were so rare that, though Patton had only worked on six such buildings by 1900, he was one of the acknowledged experts in the field, and lectured on the subject before library

and architecture conventions alike. By 1901 Patton and Miller were often working on half a dozen libraries at the same time.

The earlier libraries most admired for their architectural beauty were designed by the great Boston architect Henry Hobson Richardson. Working in his own Romanesque Revival style, Richardson created round-arched, turreted buildings, constructed of heavy granite or sandstone and reminiscent of medieval buildings from before the Gothic period. His works were characterized by great simplicity and a harmony of parts.

During the 1880s and 1890s the Richardsonian Romanesque style was imitated by architects across the country. The libraries designed by Patton and his earlier partner, Reynolds Fisher, and the first of Patton and Miller's Iowa libraries displayed the influence of this style. The P.M. Musser Library at Muscatine, constructed in 1901, was a red sandstone structure built of large blocks with Romanesque arches and deep set windows. It was typical of the firm's earlier libraries, such as the Scoville Library at Carleton College (1897) or the Hackley Memorial Library in Muskegon, Michigan (1889).

By 1900, however, a change of architectural style had occurred which greatly affected the way Carnegie libraries would look. This was the rise, primarily after the Columbian Exposition of 1893, of the Classical Revival style—a style that would eventually supersede the Romanesque. The first major Classical Revival library was McKim, Mead, and White's Boston Public Library of 1887. It was followed by a large number of richly decorated, luxurious city libraries decorated in the classical manner—buildings with many columns and much ornament built of smooth gray limestone—including Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge's Chicago Public Library of 1892 and Carrère and Hastings' New York Public



Grant Clark Miller (1870-1956) was born in Rockford, Illinois. When he was thirteen his family moved to Mount Vernon, Iowa, so Grant and his brothers and sisters could attend Cornell Academy and College. After three years at Cornell (1887-1890), Grant went to the University of Illinois to study architecture under Nathan C. Ricker. He received his B.S. and M.S. degrees in architecture in 1894 and 1895, respectively. In 1898 he was awarded a B.S. in civil engineering from Cornell. By this time he had already joined the Chicago firm of Patton and Fisher to form Patton, Fisher and Miller.

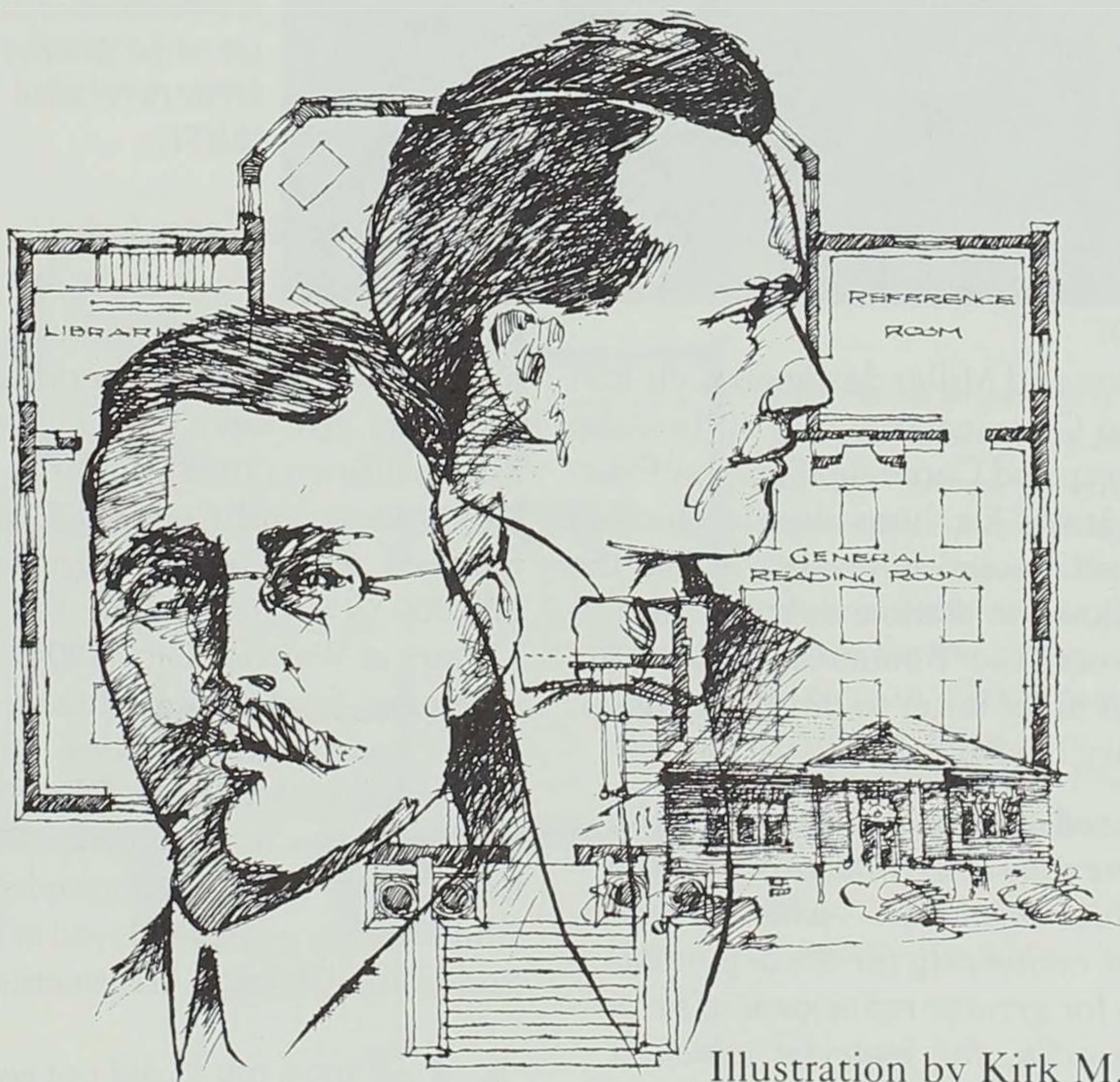
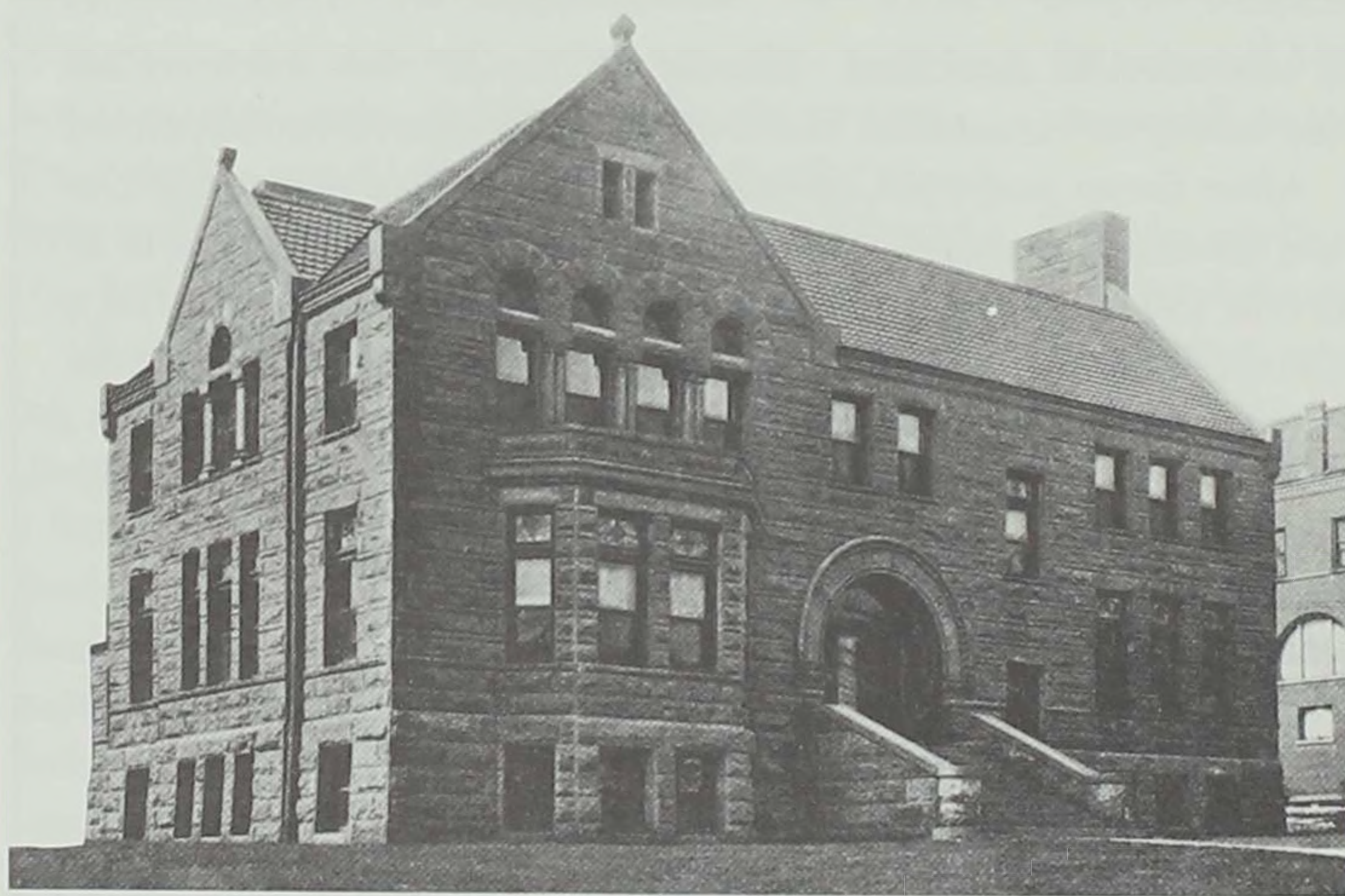


Illustration by Kirk M. Johnson

Normand Smith Patton (1852-1915), a native of Hartford, Connecticut, was educated at Amherst College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and lived most of his adult life in Oak Park, Illinois. In 1885 he formed a highly successful partnership with Reynolds Fisher. The firm specialized in college buildings and campus plans and designed the Old Main at Buena Vista College (Storm Lake, Iowa) and buildings at Carleton College (Northfield, Minnesota) and Beloit College (Beloit, Wisconsin). When Patton was appointed architect for the Chicago Board of Education, Miller, almost twenty years Patton's junior, was brought into the firm. Fisher departed for the East in 1901. From then until 1912, when the two men separated and formed new partnerships, Patton and Miller, architects, designed over 300 buildings. One-third of these buildings were libraries.





*Muscatine's P.M. Musser Library, constructed in 1901, was the first Patton and Miller-designed library in Iowa. It was one of the few Patton and Miller Iowa libraries to be financed privately. The structure was razed in 1974. (SHSI)*

Library of 1897.

In 1901 Patton and Miller designed their first library in the Classical Revival style—the Renaissance-inspired Carnegie library at Freeport, Illinois. It was for these libraries derived from the major Classical Revival style that the firm became known. Patton defined the difference between the Romanesque and the Classical styles in his letter to the Washington, Indiana, library board:

*Rock faced stone is used with the Romanesque style of architecture, but the classic architectural style—which is now used almost exclusively for library buildings—calls for greater refinement of form and, necessarily, for material which is worked into definite architectural shape, and not left with a rough, broken face.*

And Miller explained to the Iowa Library Commission:

*The revival of classic architecture is bringing with it an appreciation of the refinement that characterizes such work, and a desire that our libraries shall be built of enduring materials, and shall be nobly and fitly designed, even though simplicity is enforced by financial considerations.*

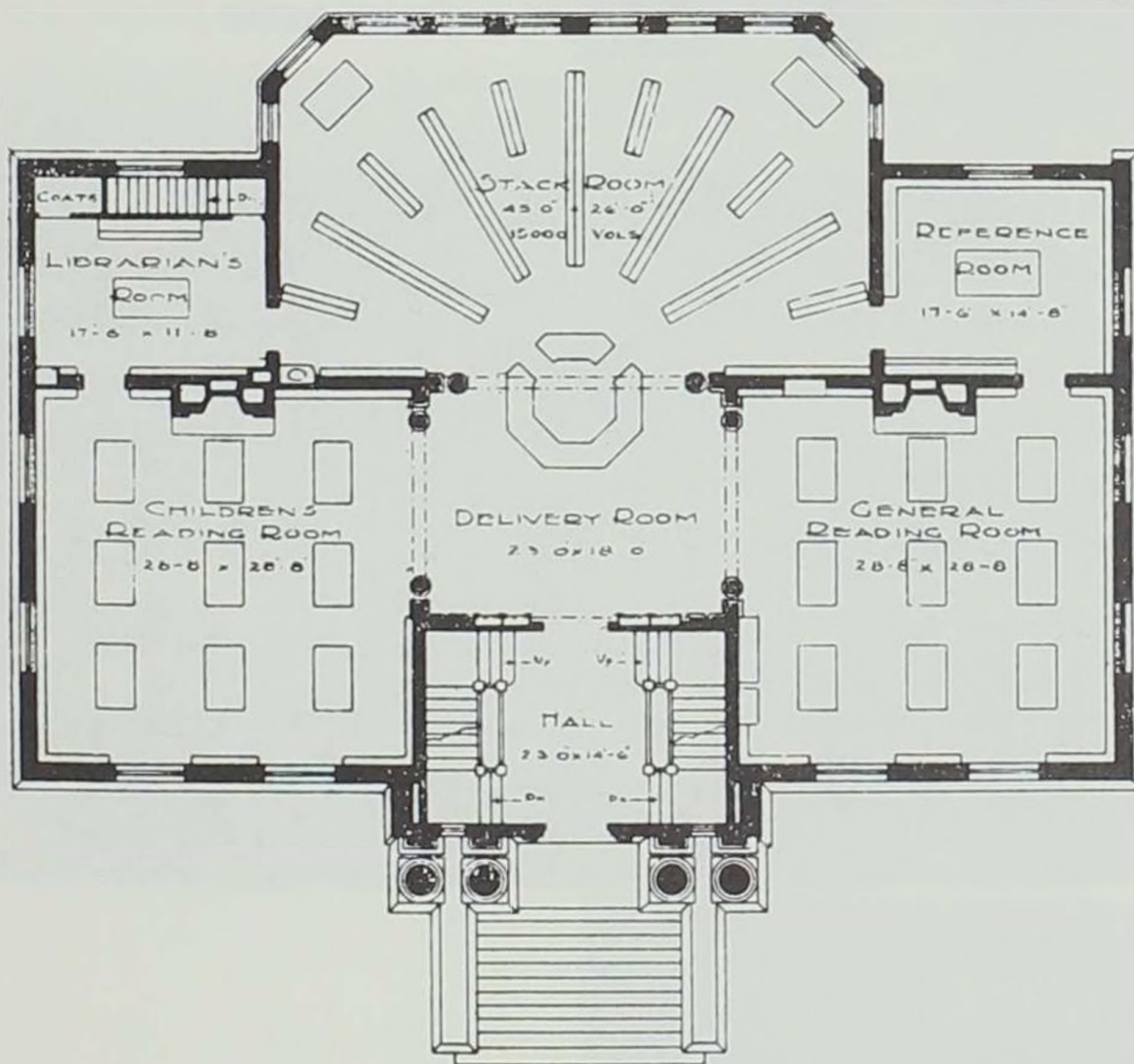
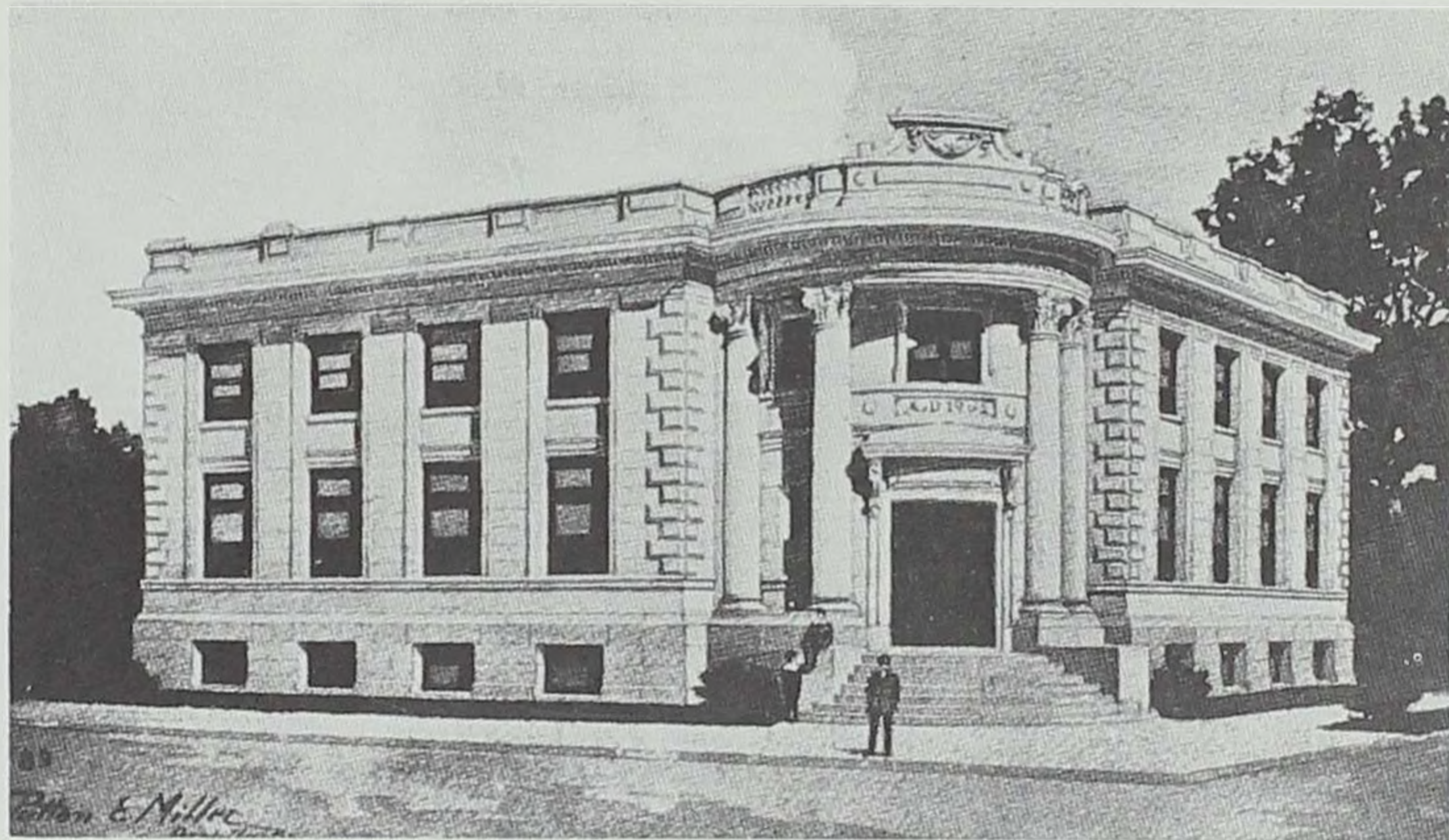
Of the several dozen monumental Classical libraries Patton and Miller designed in the next few years, five were built in Iowa. Libraries at Marshalltown (1902), Clinton (1902), Mason City (1903), and Council Bluffs (1904) were financed with Carnegie grants ranging from \$20,000 to \$70,000, while the Kendall Young Library at Webster City (1904) was financed by a bequest from a local citizen. The architects took special pride in these buildings. Patton and Miller included the Clinton and Marshalltown libraries in a collection of views of their finest work, while photographs of the Council Bluffs library were displayed at the 1904 exhibition of the Chicago Architectural Club.

Most Iowa towns did not require a \$50,000 library building with a concomitant \$5,000 yearly financial burden for library maintenance, however. Indeed, library critic Chalmers Hadley distinguished between two types of libraries in an address to the American Library Association:

*Our largest library structures continue to follow the Greek type and so secure the compactness and monumental impressiveness which it affords, but there has been a notable departure from this type in our smaller libraries in favor of a style*

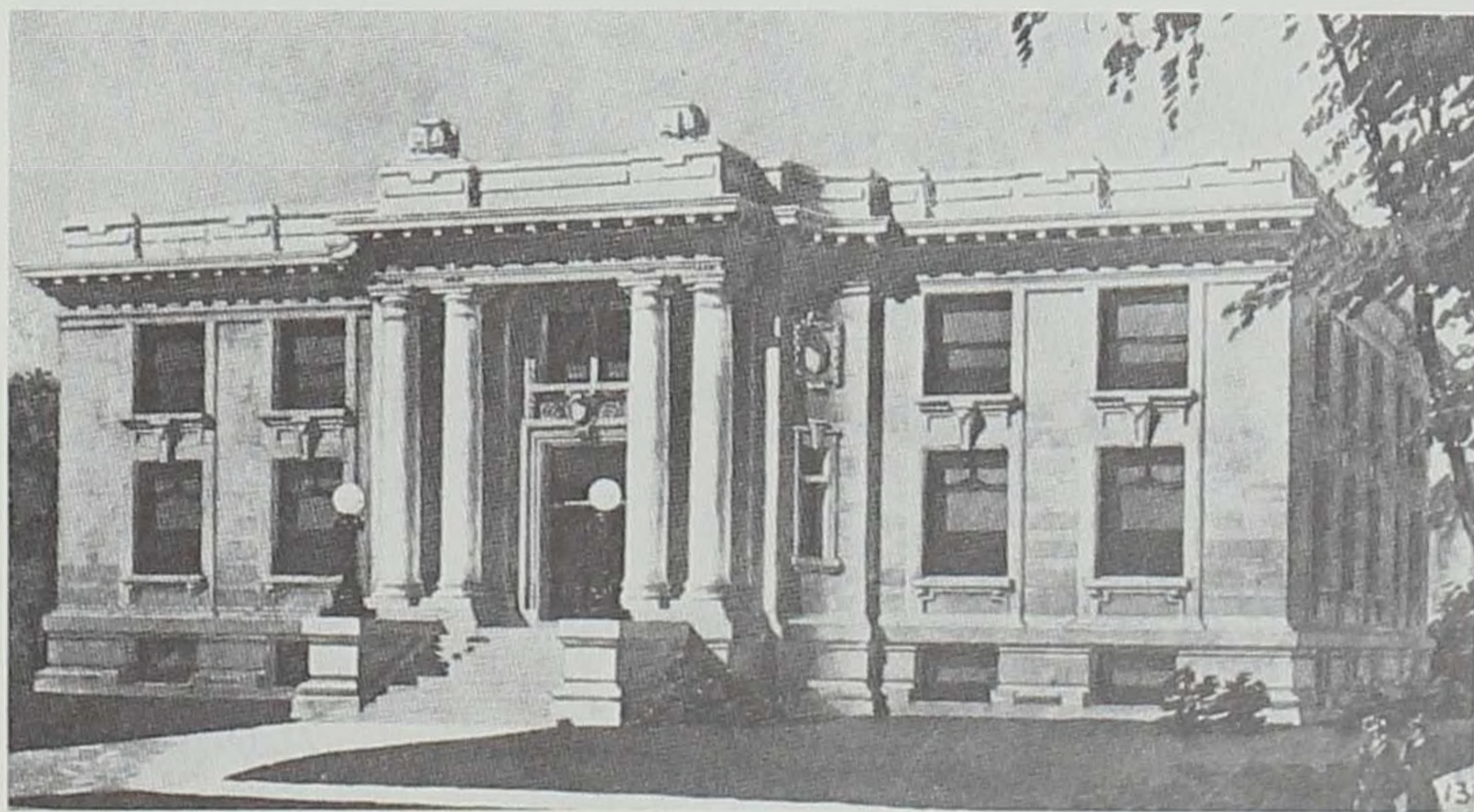


Completed in 1903, the Marshalltown Public Library was proclaimed a "model of convenience and beauty." The first floor contained a "reading room, children's room, study, librarian's room, stack and delivery room, and rotunda," while the second floor included a large lecture room, trustees room, lavatory, and museum.



Efforts to organize a library in Mason City began in 1875, when a library seemed to offer a viable means of counteracting the "influence of the open saloons." After several false starts, temporary homes for the library, and finally a fire in 1900, funding was arranged for a new, large, and centrally-located library. The building was completed in 1904.

Funding was arranged for the monumental Clinton Public Library in 1902. This was Clinton's first public library. It was one of only five Classical style Iowa libraries designed by Patton and Miller, and they considered it one of their finest works.

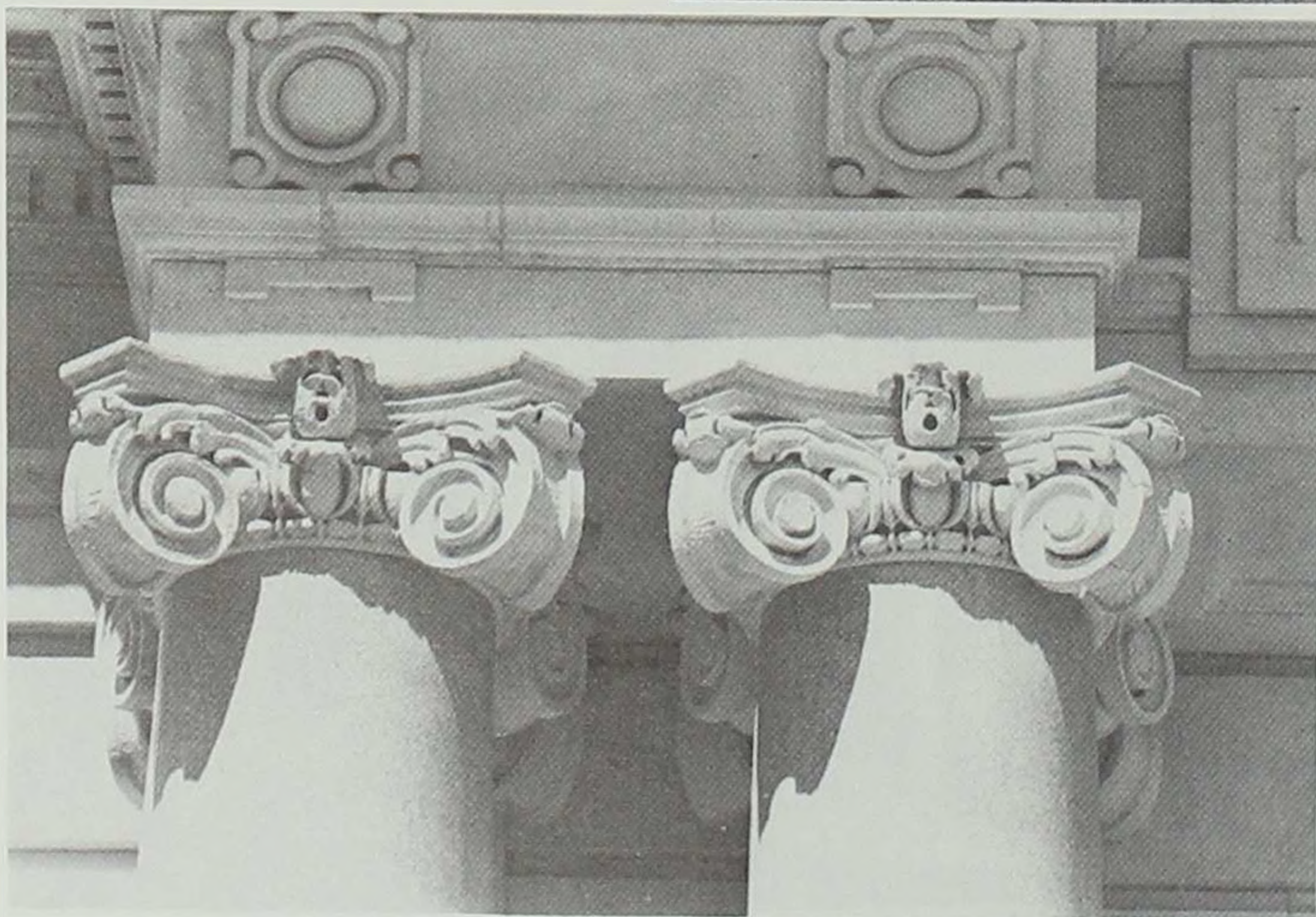






The Iowa Library Commission characterized the Kendall Young Library as "substantial and dignified in exterior appearance," as these detail shots of the front of the building show (top and bottom photographs). The rich relief decoration in the keystone arch over the front door, the pedimented portico, the balustrade-topped cornice, the modillion, and the garland combine for an impressive effect. (photographed by Sarah Dennett for the ISHD, Historic Preservation)

An 1894 bequest by Kendall Young, longtime resident of Webster City, provided for the building of a fireproof public library. This elaborate Classical style library was completed and dedicated in 1905. At the time of its completion, the Kendall Young Library was the only privately endowed library in the state. The income accruing from Young's \$200,000 endowment was devoted to expanding the library's collections and to maintaining the building.



Foliated Ionic capitals top the coupled columns of the Kendall Young Library entryway. (photographed by Sarah Dennett for the ISHD, Historic Preservation)

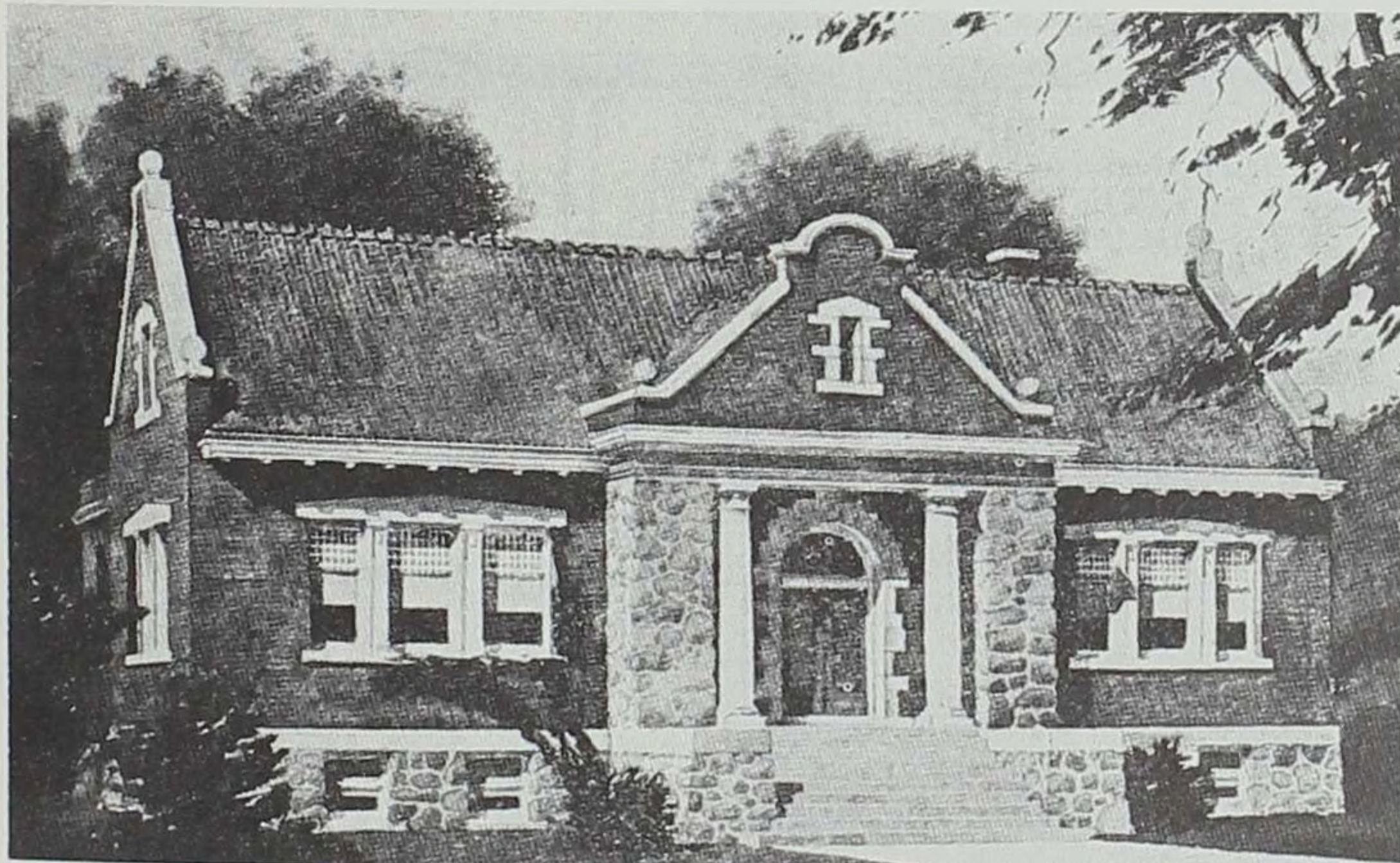


*less expensive than the Greek, less institutional and less formal in appearance, and more flexible in design.*

Between 1902 and 1904 Patton and Miller received ten commissions for libraries whose Carnegie grants ranged from \$7,500 to \$12,500. Their designs for these libraries were, accordingly, less monumental and formal. These ten buildings were one-story brick structures, almost invariably set on rusticated stone basements. The libraries at Vinton, Chariton, Monticello, Charles City, Shenandoah, and Spencer, while still symmetrically balanced, seemed much more relaxed than their formal

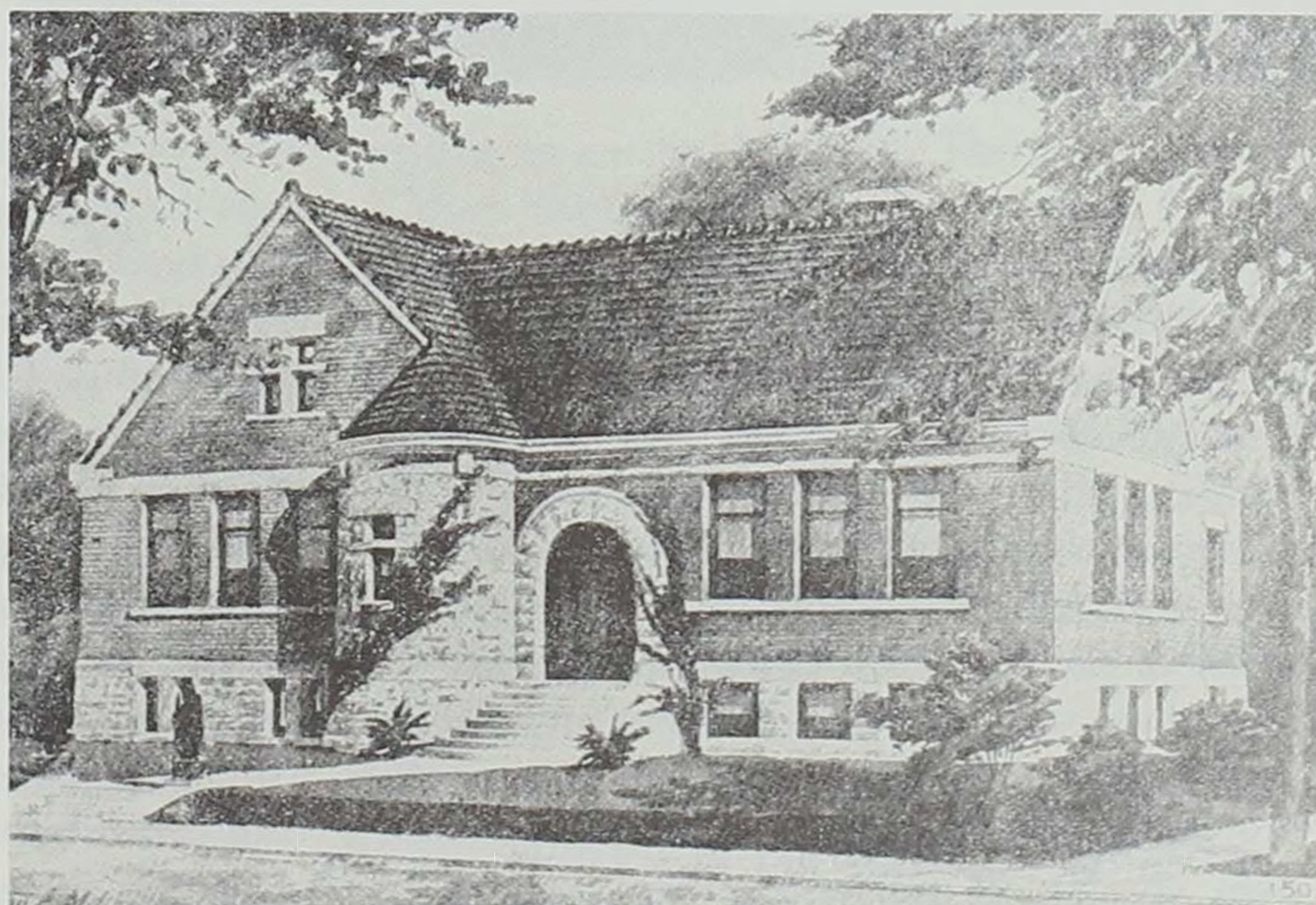
Classical counterparts. The four buildings at Eldora, Marengo, Mount Pleasant, and Algona were made even less formal by the asymmetrical placement of their entrances. The best of these buildings, such as the library at Charles City, had a romantic character that seemed little related to the historic style of the particular building—styles the architects rather loosely termed Norman, Gothic, Jacobean, or Flemish Renaissance.

After 1905 Patton and Miller received commissions for two more Carnegie libraries in Iowa. The libraries at Red Oak and Onawa look very different from the earlier buildings.

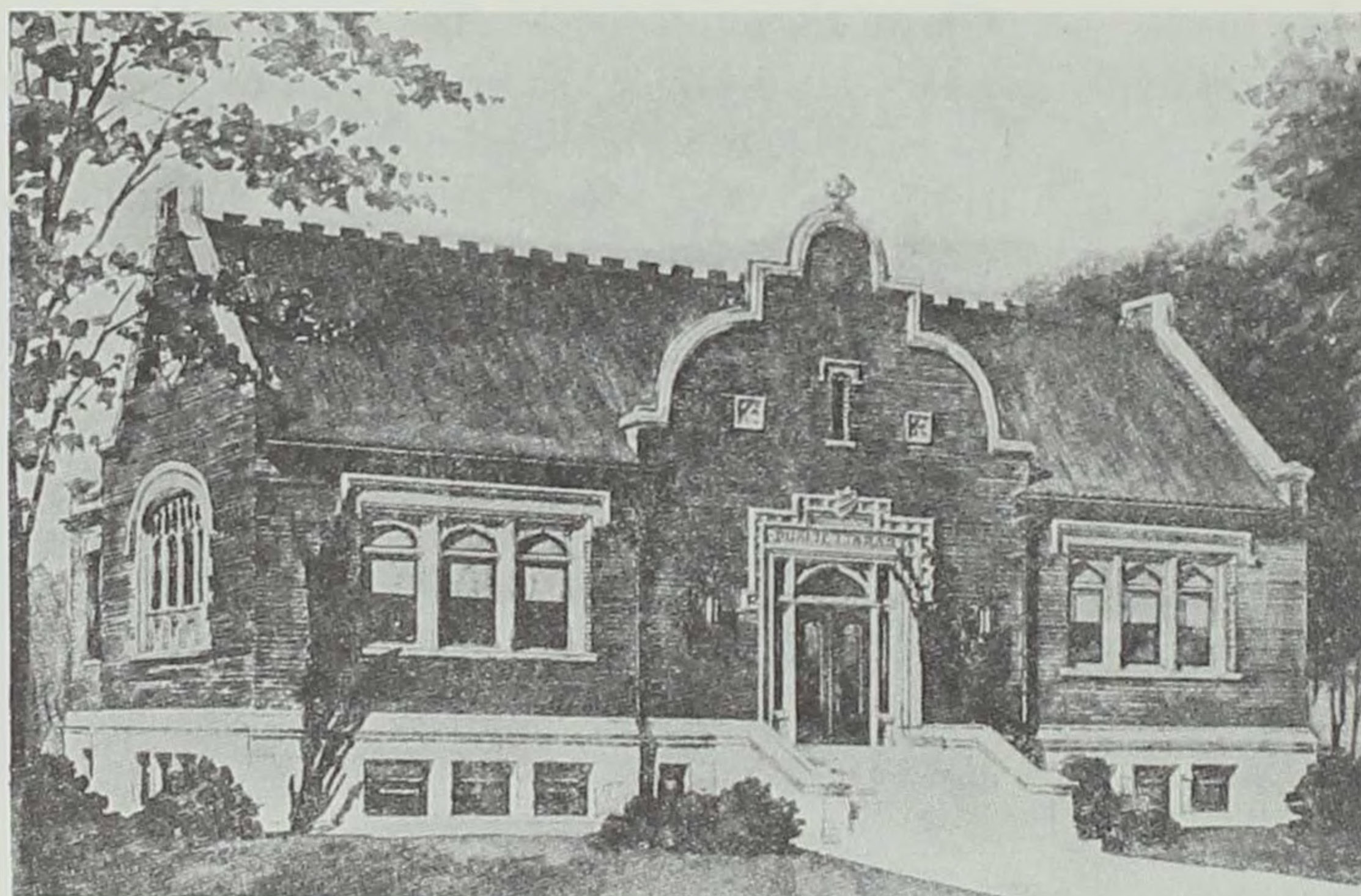


*The 1904 Charles City Public Library was one of Patton and Miller's twelve smaller Iowa libraries. The placement of the entrance illustrates the symmetrical balance of Patton and Miller's design. The one-story building was characterized by brick construction and "a foundation and front pillars of native boulders."*

*In contrast with the Charles City Public Library design (above), the 1904 Mount Pleasant Public Library is a fine example of a smaller Patton and Miller library with an asymmetrical design.*

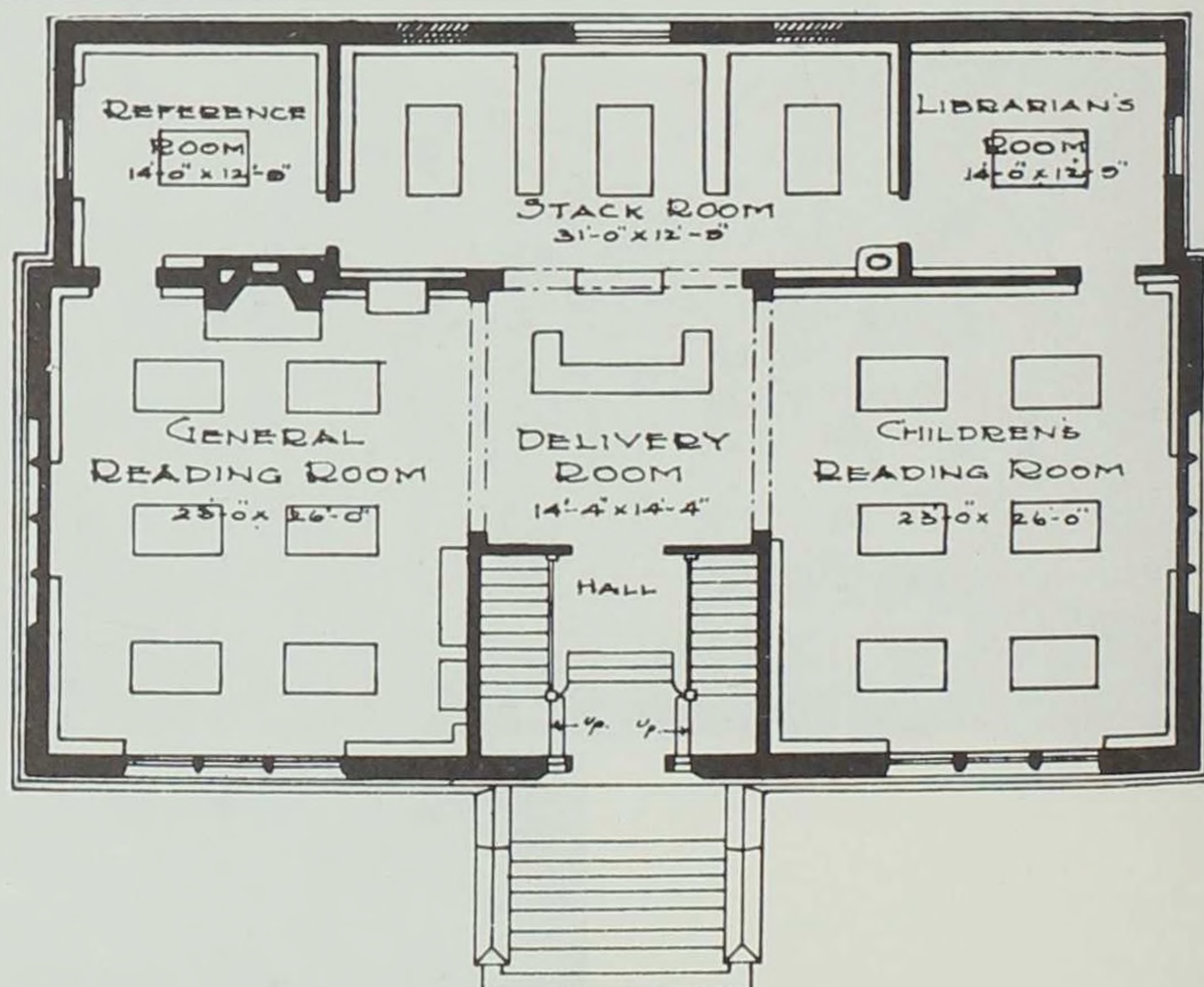






The architects' sketch of the Monticello Public Library provides another example of Patton and Miller's symmetrical design for smaller libraries. The library, completed in 1904, was characterized by "selected sand mold common brick trimmed with Bedford cut stone."

The Monticello Public Library's floor plan shows an interior arrangement "on the open shelf plan, utilizing all the walls of the building with a stack room in alcoves." In considering the plans for this library, the Iowa Library Commission concluded that the "plans are believed to provide the very best arrangement possible, and the combination of utility and economy with artistic taste promises excellent results."

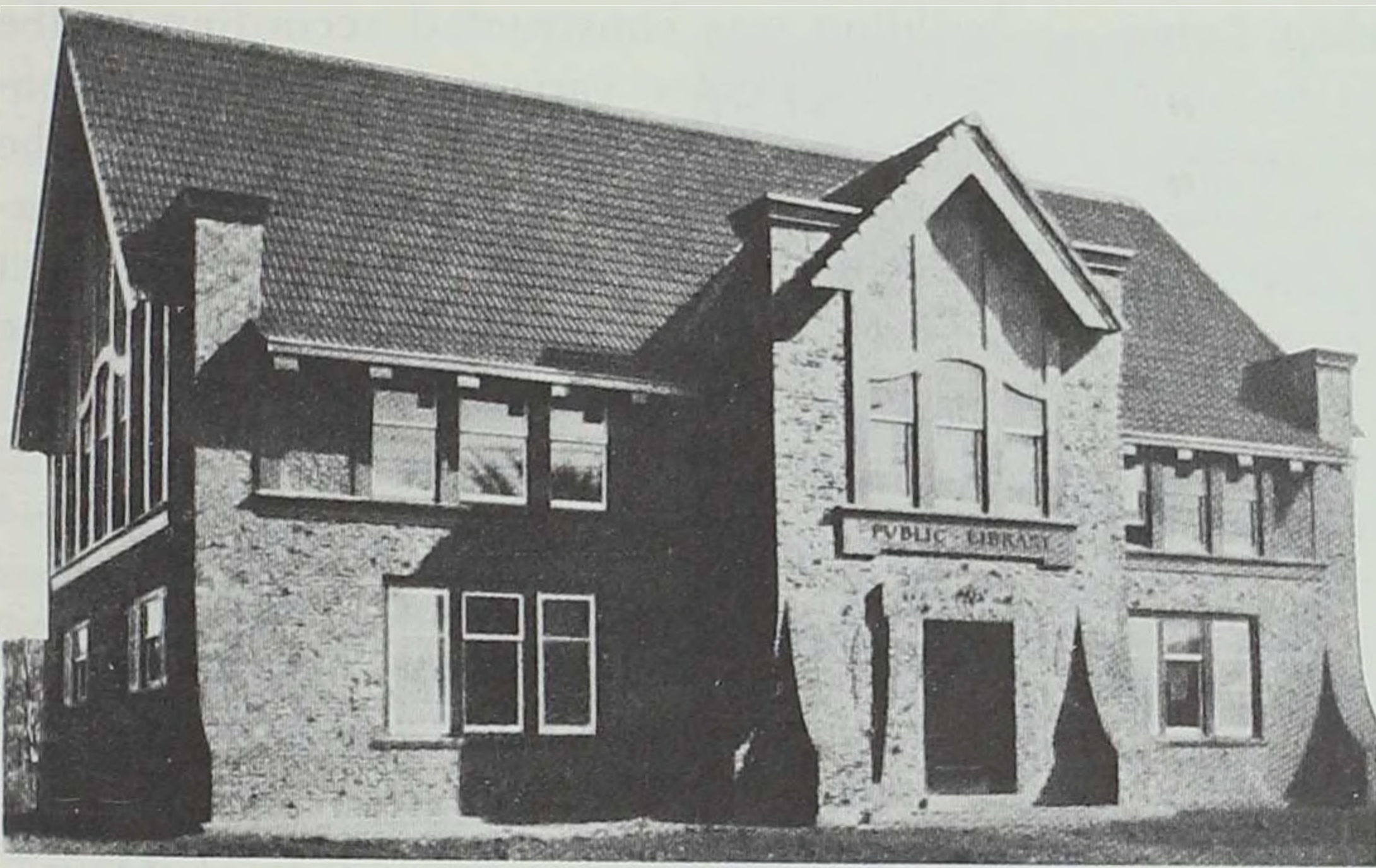


Though Miller described the Red Oak library as "Elizabethan English," that phrase did not begin to cover the unusual features of the building, while the Onawa library could not be made to fit any historic style.

In 1905 the architects began designing a series of these more original works. The various movements of Early Modern architecture in Europe and America were becoming better known in the Midwest—indeed, America's own version of Early Modern, the Prairie

School, was almost entirely a Midwestern phenomenon. In addition, the works of the Glasgow School and the Art Nouveau style of France and Belgium were receiving some attention, while German Early Modern architects exhibited at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. Of even greater significance was the Austrian movement, known as the Vienna Secession, which had particular appeal for less radical architects because of its derivation from formal, classical styles. Finally, influence from





*The 1909 Red Oak Public Library was a Patton and Miller design of a very different style. The two-story building was characterized by a rough-textured clinker brick and half-timbering style and a gabled roof. (SHSI)*

*The Onawa Public Library was also completed in 1909, and, again, shows a Patton and Miller design very different from their earlier Iowa libraries. (photographed by Gerald Mansheim for the ISHD, Historic Preservation)*



the Arts and Crafts movement began to show itself in otherwise Classical buildings with simple plastered walls with dark oak trim and cozy inglenooks and fireplaces. While later Patton and Miller buildings were not examples of the Prairie School, many of them nevertheless show the influence of these various modern currents. Thus, the Red Oak library had a strong Arts and Crafts orientation with its treatment of the half-timbering and the use of rough-textured "clinker" bricks, while the Onawa library combined Art Nouveau curves with rectilinear details derived from the Vienna Secession. Some of these trends were

visible in earlier libraries. The interior of the Eldora library, for example, was pure Arts and Crafts, while the heavy flower pots and urns of the Clinton library and the stylized classical details of the Webster City library were reminiscent of the Austrian Early Modern style.

**T**o the librarian and, indeed, Andrew Carnegie, the plan of the building was more important than the style of the exterior. Miller described the most common plan of a public library to the Iowa Library Association:

*the location of the entrance [is] at the*



center of the front of the building. Lying directly back of the entrance is the delivery room; to the right and left of the delivery room in the two wings, we find a general reading room and reference room, a children's reading room, and back of the delivery room, to the rear, is located a stack room, and of a width that will overlap the ends of the two reading rooms. In one of the internal angles formed by the intersection of the stack room and reading room, is found the librarian's and cataloguing room, and in the other a reference study, which is convenient to both the stack and general reading room. . . . This same general arrangement may be carried out in a building with a corner entrance, with slight modifications, and can be made a very practical plan.

This general plan, which came to be known as the "Chariton Plan" after the design used for the Chariton library, was followed in most of the firm's Iowa libraries. The Marshalltown

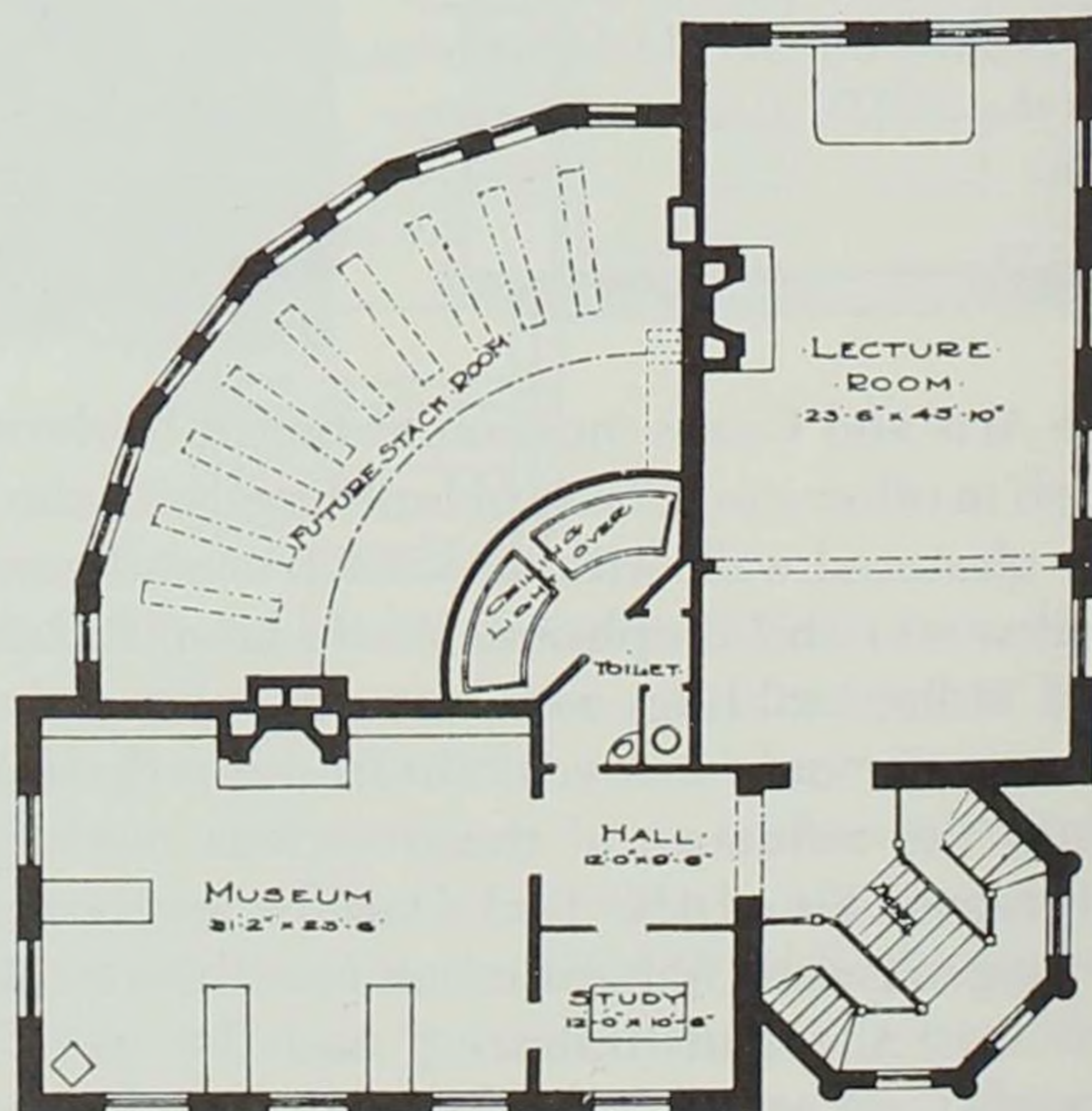
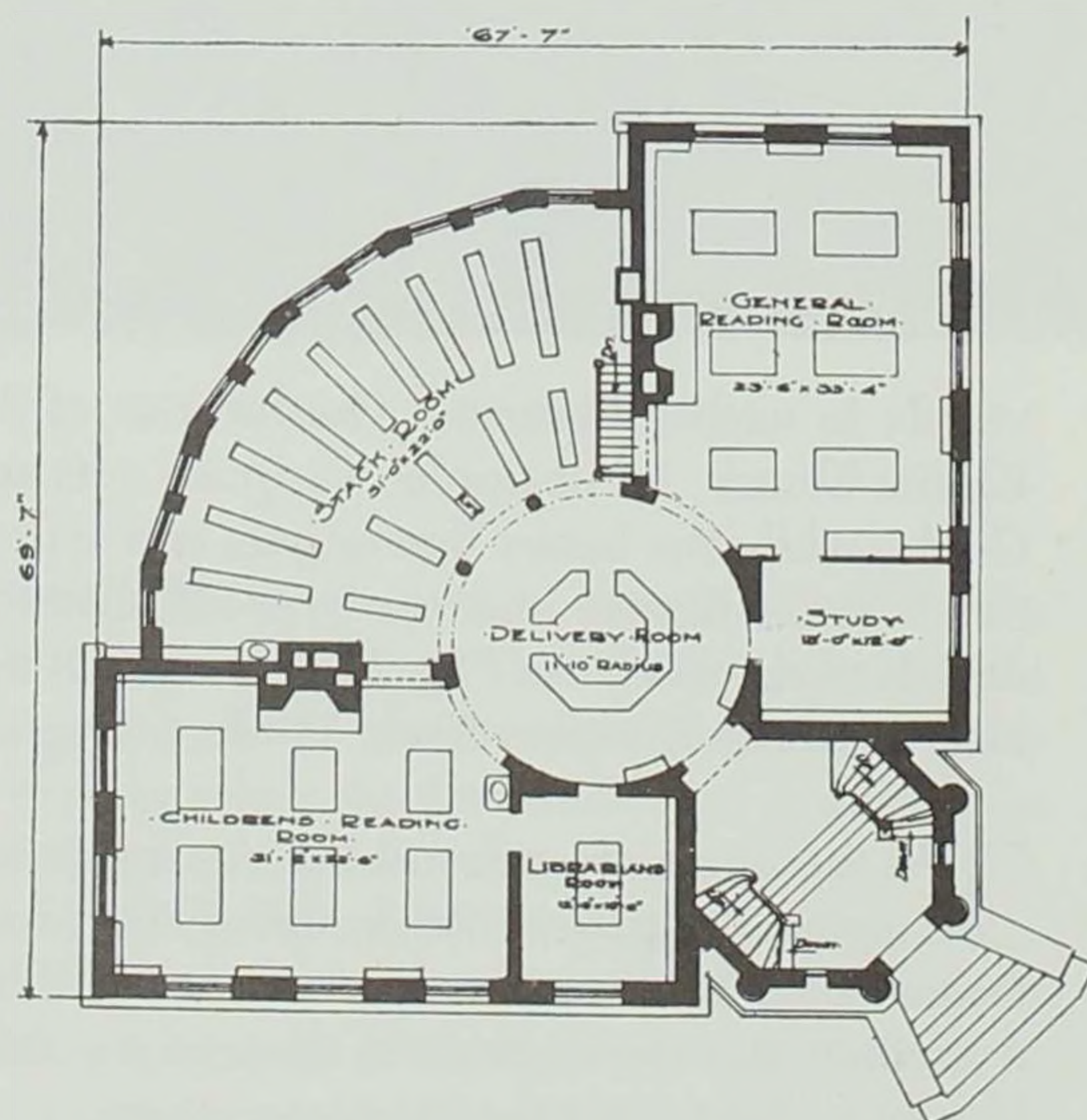
building was constructed according to the corner entrance variation of this plan mentioned by Miller. Miller further reminded the Association that, although most modern libraries were built with an open stack arrangement allowing free access to all the books to the patrons, the stacks still needed some supervision by the librarian.

*There is only one arrangement that promises perfect supervision, viz: the radiating stack, which permits the librarian from one point to view every aisle between the bookcases.*

*. . . It, furthermore, gives better lighting than is possible with parallel book stacks. The aisles between the cases widen out towards the windows, permitting broader windows and more efficient lighting.*

The Eldora library was built with the radiating stack idea used in combination with the features of the Chariton plan. Radiating stacks were used in the Marshalltown library as well.

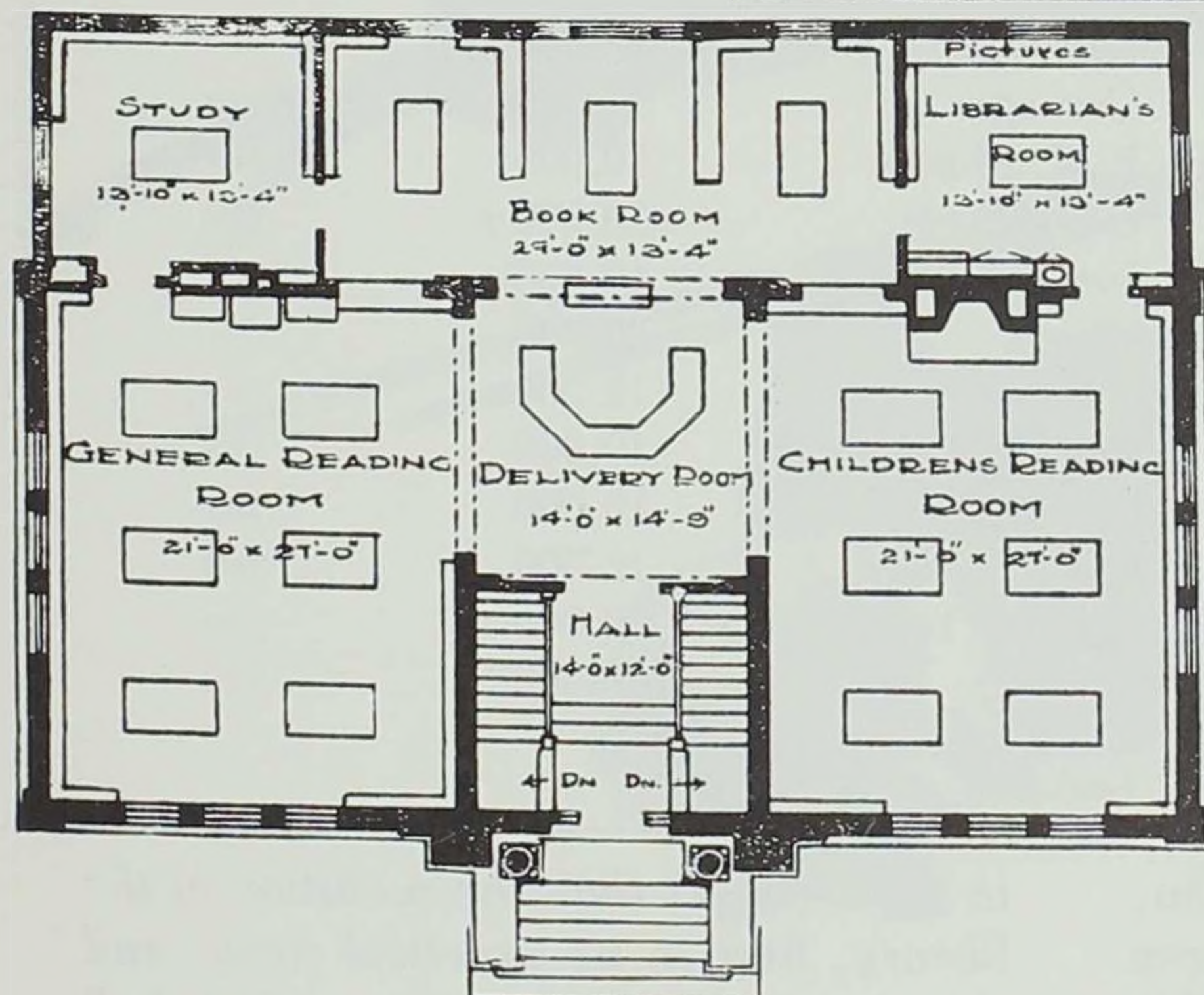
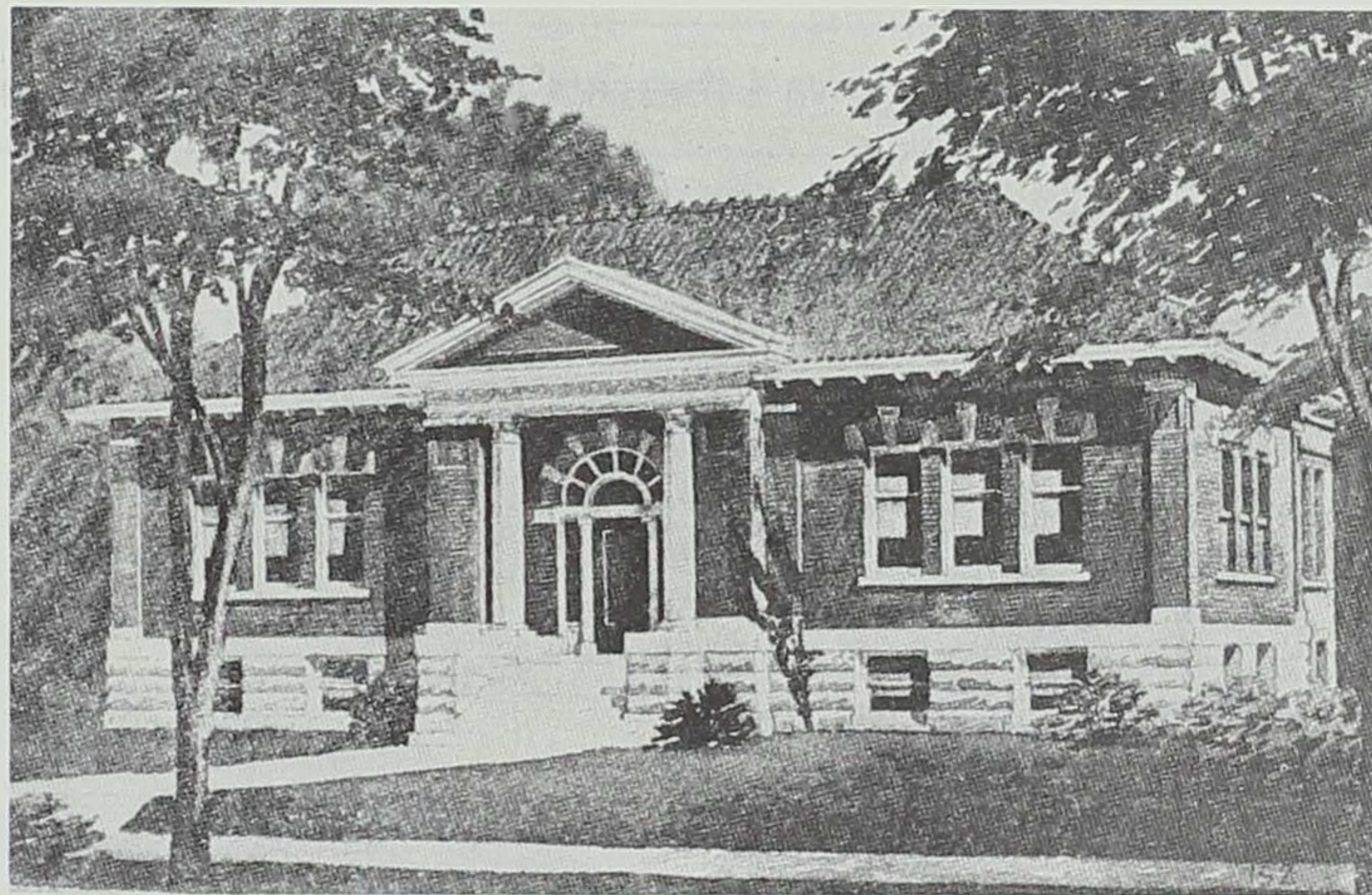
The Patton and Miller firm was dissolved in



The Marshalltown Public Library floor plans illustrate not only the exceptional corner entrance variation of the Chariton Plan, but an effective use of the radiating stack arrangement for books.

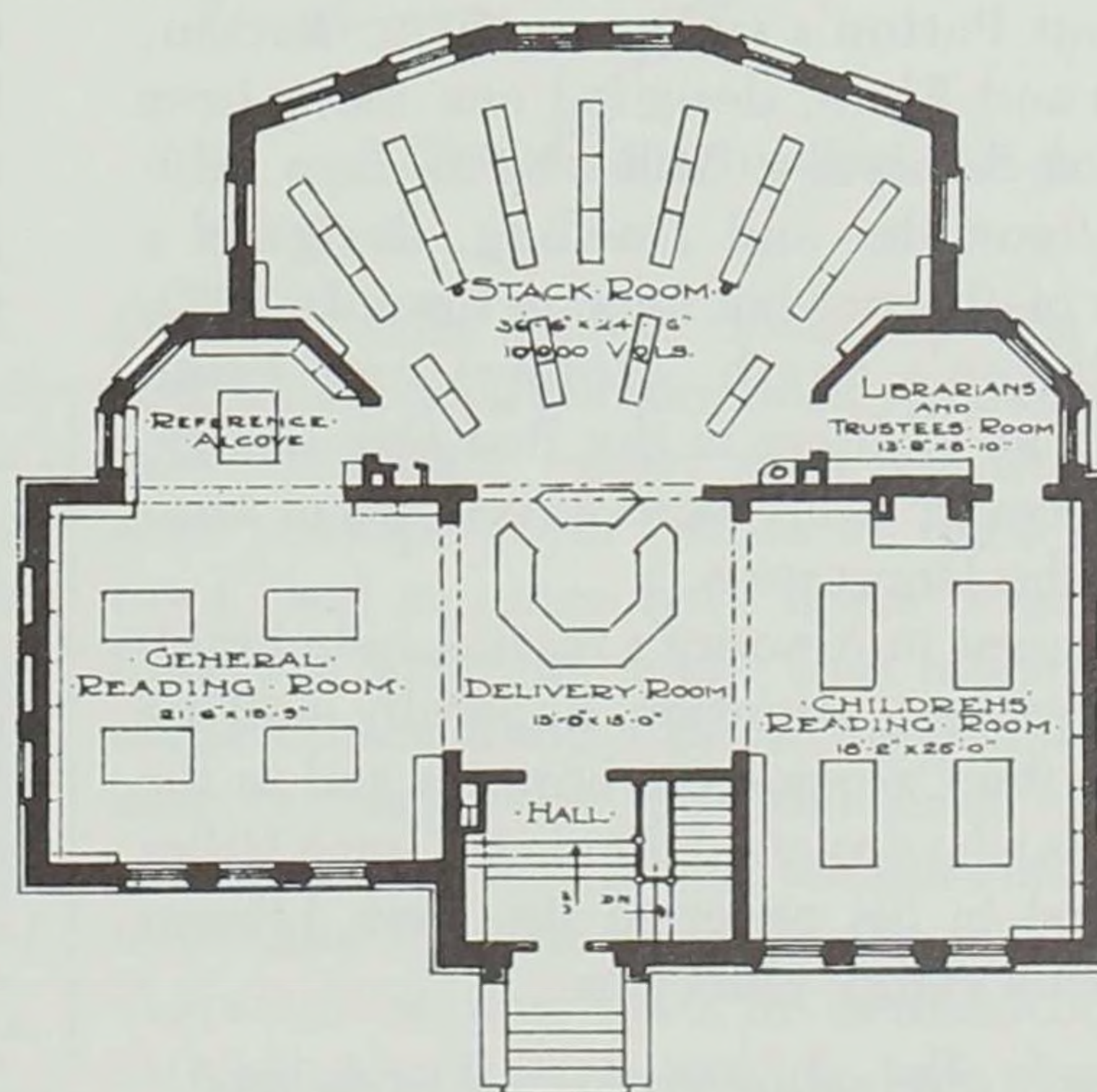


The Chariton Free Public Library was completed in 1904 at a cost of \$11,000. One of the smaller-style Patton and Miller libraries, this building served as the model for the "Chariton Plan"—the design followed by Patton and Miller in most of their Iowa libraries.



The Chariton Plan suggested not only an entrance at the center of the front of the building, but an interior arrangement of rooms which provided a workable library plan.

The plan for the 1903 Eldora Public Library combined Patton and Miller's Chariton Plan with the radiating stack arrangement for books.





## Iowa Libraries Designed by Patton and Miller

Location	Date Constructed	Funding	Cost	Still Standing?
Algona	1905	Carnegie	\$10,000	yes
Chariton	1904	Carnegie	11,000	yes
Charles City	1904	Carnegie	12,500	yes
Clinton	1903-04	Carnegie	45,000	yes
Council Bluffs	1904-05	Carnegie	70,000	yes
Eldora	1903	Carnegie	10,000	yes
Marengo	1905	Carnegie	10,000	yes
Marshalltown	1903	Carnegie	30,000	yes
Mason City	1904	Carnegie & citizens of Mason City	(20,000 + 10,000) 30,000	yes
Monticello	1904	Carnegie	12,500	yes
Mount Pleasant	1904	Carnegie	12,500	yes
Muscatine	1901	P.M. Musser	40,000	no
Onawa	1908-09	Carnegie & Judge Addison Oliver	(10,000 + 10,000) 20,000	yes
Red Oak	1909	Carnegie	12,500	yes
Shenandoah	1905	Carnegie	10,000	yes
Spencer	1904-05	Carnegie	10,000	no
Vinton	1903	Carnegie	12,500	yes
Webster City	1905	Kendall Young	50,000	yes
West Liberty	1906	Carnegie	7,500	yes

Source: Reports of the Iowa Library Commission, 1900-1910.

1912, but Patton's successor firm, Patton, Holmes and Flinn, designed one more Iowa library, at Sigourney. Miller's new firm, Miller, Fullenwider and Dowling, designed a number of libraries but none in Iowa. In 1923, after Patton's death, Holmes and Flinn designed an addition to the Red Oak library. Both successor firms were forced out of business by the Depression.

As interest in America's revival style buildings increases, attention hopefully will be given to the Carnegie era libraries and to the architects who designed them. As Grant Miller concluded in his paper to the Iowa Library Association eighty years ago:

*No more interesting problem is presented*

*to the architect than the evolution of the library, first in its practical form, and then in an artistic expression, that shall fitly represent the high position the building occupies in the community.*

## Note on Sources

The Reports of the Iowa Library Commission, Des Moines, 1900 to 1912, proved to be a rich source of information for the preparation of this article. Also valuable were two books devoted to Carnegie libraries: George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), and Theodore W. Koch, *A Book of Carnegie Libraries* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1917). The *Collection of Views of Public Buildings Designed by Patton and Miller*, preserved at the University of Iowa Library, provided the base for the article's illustrations. Grant Miller's descriptive essay, "Library Buildings," was published in the *Quarterly of the Iowa Library Commission* in January 1903.



# John C. Mabray:

## A Con Artist in the Corn Belt

by Raymond A. Smith, Jr.

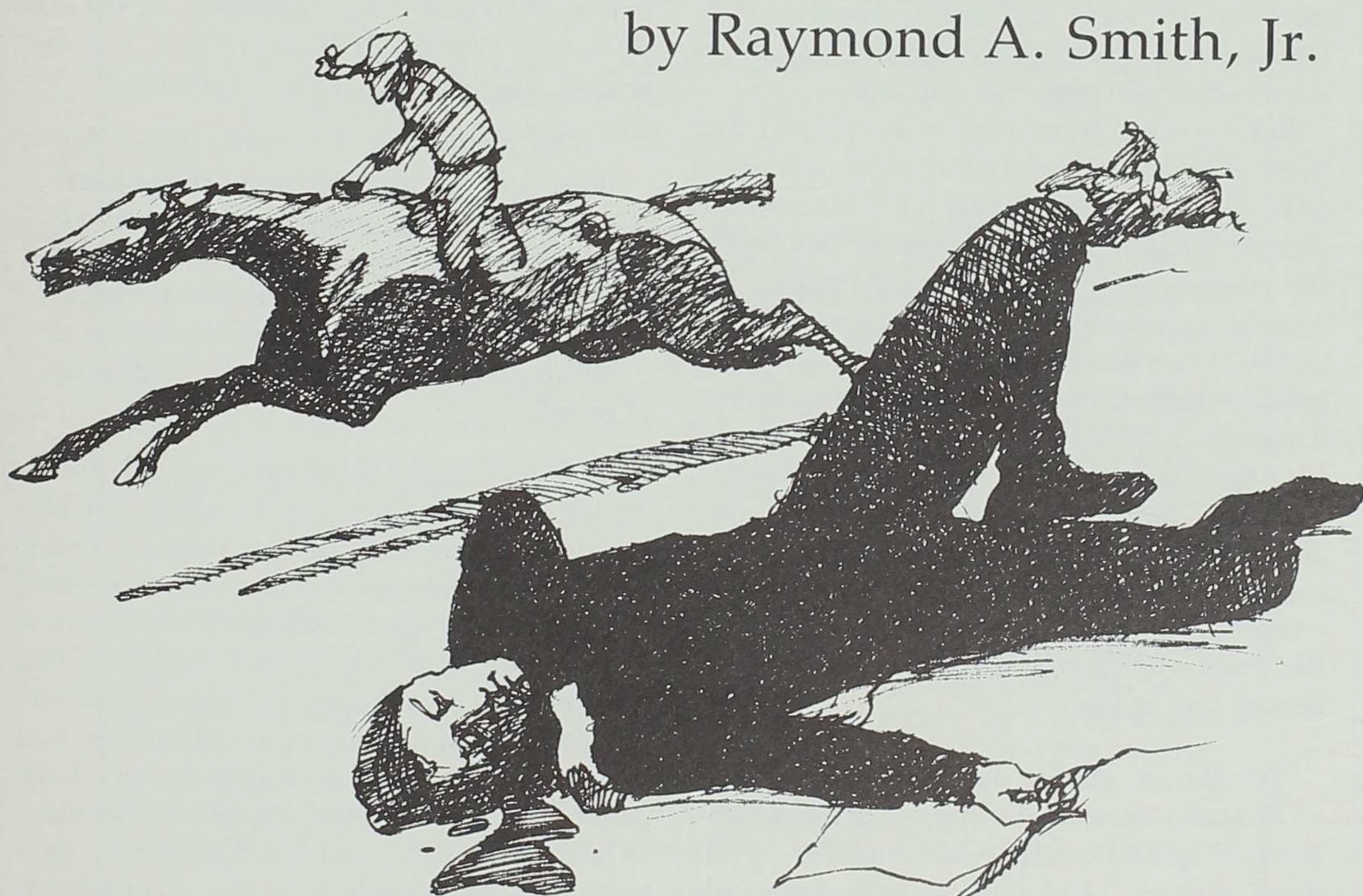


Illustration by Kirk M. Johnson

On Monday, March 21, 1910, John C. Mabray stood in a federal court at Council Bluffs, Iowa, before Judge Smith McPherson. The judge sentenced Mr. Mabray to two years in the federal penitentiary at Fort Leavenworth and a fine of \$10,000. It was the maximum sentence that he could give Mabray under the circumstances. Thus ended a swindling operation the size and scope of which were staggering. Operating largely out of

Council Bluffs, John C. Mabray's "Big Store" had, for almost a decade, been separating poor fools from their money with regularity on a scale perhaps never before or since seen in Iowa. And con men have never been absent from our scene for long. One might almost suggest that the con man and his victims are an inherent part of the American scene.

It is always with a certain measure of fear and trepidation that one raises questions of national character at any time or concerning any national group. It is easy to talk about the



German penchant for discipline, the phlegmatic qualities of the English temperament, the stinginess of the Scot, the anti-tax proclivities of the French, but then one recalls hearing statements about miserliness and Jews or rhythm and blacks and one becomes very, very cautious. National and racial characteristics tend to become badly mixed up and arguments about either are generally confusing.

But if one can leave aside race, it seems that there may have been times in the historical past when national characteristics seemed plainer or easier to discern than at other times. Is it possible that one might suggest traits of the American character which were more obvious eighty or one hundred years ago than they are today? I think many historians would agree that Americans, throughout most of their history, have been mobile types tending always to be in search of opportunities for betterment. One might add something to the effect that Americans tended to be forever searching for optimal opportunities, the kind associated with taming the frontier, searching for precious metals, or speculating in land.

**I**t almost seems that one can say that Americans took the phrase "to make one's fortune" quite literally with emphasis on the word "fortune." And one can see from an early date two classes of individuals on the American scene, with both classes adding something to our evanescent notions of the American national character. One class was made up of con men, "steerers," bunco artists, or flim-flam men, and the other class consisted of victims, "mikes," or just plain fools. Consider a bit of the literature on the subject. Propositions that "could not be refused" were the stuff of many Americans' activities in Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Moreover, if the citizens of this country tended to take umbrage with the poor Englishman, they had to put up with the images drawn by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in that magnificently imper-

fect novel, *The Gilded Age*. Indeed, as the nineteenth century came to an end and the twentieth century began, an increasing number of literary pieces were being written on the theme that greed was abroad in the land and that nefarious men were constantly finding new ways to prey on the innocent. At the conclusion of William Hawley Smith's *The Promoters*, one of the characters remarked:

*The temptation to acquire great fortunes quickly, and the unguarded opportunities for doing so by the use of methods which were right under the old order of things, but which are altogether wrong as things are now, have put too severe a strain on the moral fiber of a good many people.*

How complicated it must have seemed, for the "temptation to acquire great fortune quickly" has always been a difficult temptation to resist. An extreme statement on American national character in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries might well suggest that citizens of this country have been largely unable to resist just that temptation. Or, to put it another way, one might say that citizens of this country have generally exhibited desires to get rich quickly, to bet on sure things, and to cherish easy ways to wealth. The terrible successes of confidence men in this country have been due to their ability to play on those desires and the truth of such a statement can be seen by considering the Council Bluffs career of J.C. Mabray.

\* \* \*

**J**ohn C. Mabray was a con artist of eminent skill. Schooled at Webb City, Missouri, in the workings of the fake footrace and other ploys, he arrived in Council Bluffs sometime around the turn of the century. Within a period of less than ten years, he set up a fairly complicated operation, plucked an unknown number of victims of perhaps as much as \$5,000,000, and had a very successful time of it until his arrest in Little Rock, Arkansas, on 23 February



Office of the State Historical Society

## Thank You

*We would like to thank the many Society members who voted in the recent Board of Trustees election and expressed their preference for the 1982 Palimpsest article most deserving of the Trustees' Award. Your active support of the State Historical Society is greatly appreciated. The election results will be announced in the September News for Members, as will the names of the recipients of awards to individuals and organizations for achievement in state and local history.*

## Elderhostel 1983

For a fifth consecutive summer, Dr. Loren N. Horton, historian and head of the State Historical Society's Educational and Community Services program area, will offer a course for the 1983 Iowa Elderhostel program. The highly successful Elderhostel program is designed to offer people sixty years of age or older the opportunity to take week-long classes in a college environment and to sample campus cultural events, recreation facilities, and dormitory life—all for a very minimal cost. The twenty-four member consortium of Iowa regent universities, private college and universities, and community colleges which comprise the Iowa Elderhostel program has this year gained additional support and funding from the Iowa Humanities Board and the Iowa Arts Council for special kinds of courses. Dr. Horton's course, "Methods in Historical Research," has proven to be an especially popular course in the five years that it has been offered, with many Elderhostel students finding it valuable enough to repeat—once or several times. In the course of the week, Dr. Horton examines the techniques of historical research and writing, and the variety of sources available to researchers. The Society library and manuscript collections offer a generous range of materials for researchers, from government census records and newspapers to private manuscript and photograph collections. One topic of particular interest to Dr. Horton is the way researchers interpret historical photographs. "You can tell all kinds of things by looking at a photograph; like the styles of dress, the event the photo may have been taken for, the geography of the area, the furniture, and so on. All these things can help tell you about the time frame the family lived in and possibly things like their income." For more information about the Iowa Elderhostel program, or Dr. Horton's July 17-23 course, contact: Peggy Houston, Director, Iowa Elderhostel, C108 Seashore Hall, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242.

## CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS, 1983

June 25	Annual Meeting and Banquet of the State Historical Society, Ames
July 14-16	National Genealogy Conference, Hartford, Connecticut
July 17-29	Institute for Historical Editing, Madison, Wisconsin
July 23	Iowa Chapter, Victorian Society in America, Des Moines
August 10-13	Inter-regional Conference on the Women's West, Sun Valley, Idaho
September 27-30	Midwest Museums Conference, Flint, Michigan
Sept. 28-Oct. 2	National Oral History Colloquium, Seattle, Washington
October 4-7	American Association for State and Local History, Victoria, British Columbia
October 5-8	Society of American Archivists, Minneapolis, Minnesota
October 12-15	Western History Association, Salt Lake City, Utah
October 16-17	Iowa Museum Association, Fort Dodge
October 21-23	Midwest Archaeological Conference, Iowa City
October 22	Iowa Local Historical and Museum Association, Des Moines
October 26-30	National Trust for Historic Preservation, San Antonio, Texas
November 4-5	Iowa Genealogical Society, Ames
November 9-11	The 17th Conference on Archives and History, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri
November 9-12	Southern Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina
December 27-30	American Historical Association, Washington, D.C.

July 1983



## New Publication Available: Fire Insurance Maps Holdings

Peter H. Curtis, head of the State Historical Society's Library Collections program area, is pleased to announce the completion—and availability to the public—of a list of holdings of the three largest fire insurance map collections in the state: the Office of the State Historical Society, the University of Iowa, and the Iowa State Archives. *Fire Insurance Maps of Iowa Cities and Towns* also includes the Library of Congress' holdings of Sanborn Map Company Iowa maps.

Increasingly, fire insurance maps are receiving recognition as superb sources of historical information for researchers, whether historians, genealogists, geographers, or urban planners. Hundreds of Iowa communities have been mapped since the 1870s. These maps are characterized by both a large mapping scale, and a color coding system which distinguishes between building materials and types of structures.

The compilers of this list of holdings, Peter H. Curtis, Office of the State Historical Society, Richard S. Green, University of Iowa Library, and Edward N. McConnell, Iowa State Archives, believe this to be a complete list of all existing state fire maps. This publication is available for purchase from the State Historical Society for \$3.25, postpaid.

## Alsatia Mellecker, A Many-Talented Middle Person

Alsatia Mellecker considers herself a "middle person" at the State Historical Society. Her duties range from day-to-day typing and supervising payroll to doing various kinds of research and writing speeches.

As a Clerk-Typist III, Alsatia works in the Administrative Support Services area of the Society. She has worked at the Society since 1976, when she served as a part-time file clerk while attending the University of Iowa. She became a full-time employee in 1982, the same year she received her bachelor of arts degrees in American studies and history with an emphasis in women's studies. Alsatia says that part of her job in Administrative Support Services is to take care of the everyday operation of the Society in an efficient manner, so that everyone else can go about their work uninterrupted. Hers is a position that encompasses a wide variety of tasks and it is rarely routine. "New things come up every day," she suggests.

Alsatia is originally from Davenport, Iowa, but has lived in Iowa City since 1967. Before beginning her college career in 1967 she worked as a salesperson for a wholesale grocery company, as a secretary at the university, and also as a bartender.

Alsatia finds the dissemination of history interesting. She has a special interest in United States history during the 1930s. It is an era from which she also collects books and music.

Alsatia is co-authoring an article for an upcoming issue of the *Palimpsest* and she also hopes to have a paper published soon on the subject of divorce proceedings during Iowa's territorial period. During this nineteenth century period divorce proceedings were handled through a legislative rather than judicial procedure. Alsatia says that she is interested in continuing her education, not necessarily to obtain a better job, but in order to broaden her historical perspective.

In her spare time Alsatia enjoys photography, aerobic exercising, bicycling, and reading history.



The following four pages of this issue of the newsletter (the middle four pages) are devoted to an extended discussion of the available resources of the Library Collections program area of the Iowa State Historical Department/Office of the State Historical Society. The Society staff, believing this to be useful information for Society members, and for researchers generally, decided to publish it in a brochure form inside the newsletter in order to insure that all members might receive a copy. The editor is interested in your reaction to this format. Will you let us know what you think about it? Address your comments to: Mary K. Fredericksen, *Palimpsest* Editor, Office of the State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.





## Library Collections

The State Historical Society is an office of the Iowa State Historical Department, an agency of the state of Iowa. Founded in 1857, the Society consists of three program areas: Publications, Educational and Community Services, and Library Collections. The Library Collections are open to public use free of charge, during the hours listed below. Anyone interested in an Iowa topic—past or present—is likely to find useful information in the Society collections. Materials of particular interest to researchers include local, state, and national histories, biographies, government documents, and over 100 current historical periodicals. Genealogists will find county histories, city directories, census data, cemetery records, atlases, plat books, and numerous state and local genealogical publications.

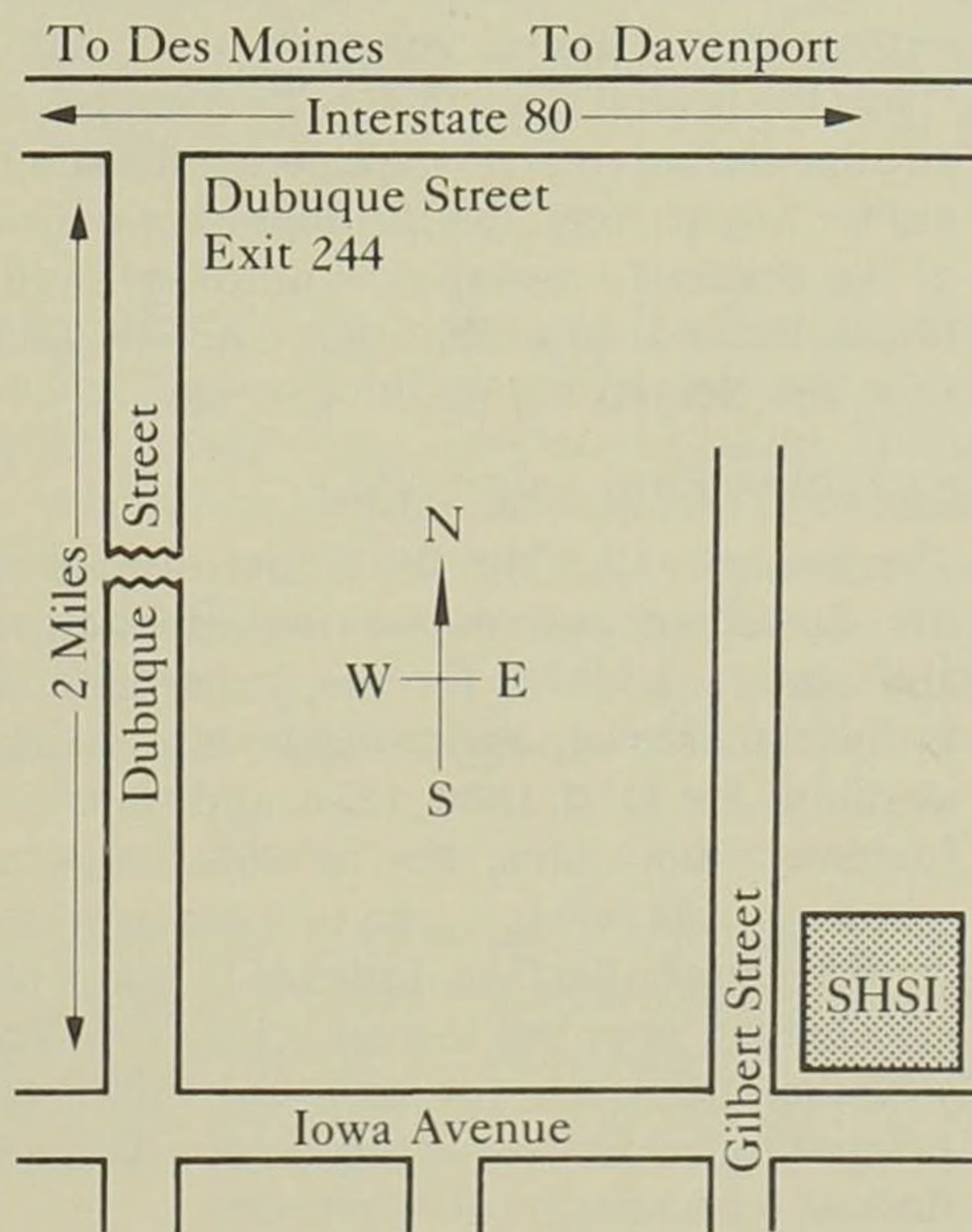
To aid all researchers, the library has a professional staff, two reading rooms, and ten microfilm readers. The Library Collections staff invites you to use the Society collections for serious research and personal enjoyment.

Books, microforms, newspapers, census material, and bound maps are located on the first floor of the Society's Centennial Building. Manuscripts, photographs, and unbound maps are kept on the second floor, in an area with

### HOURS

The library collections are open Monday through Saturday from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., and from 6:00 to 9:00 P.M. on the last Tuesday of each month. During the summer months, June through August, the library maintains special Saturday hours, 8:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. The building is closed on all state holidays. Additionally, when a state holiday falls on a Friday or a Monday, the library is closed on Saturday.

The manuscript, photograph, and map collections are closed on Saturdays. However, if advance arrangements are made, materials from these collections may be used on Saturdays in the first floor reading room.





its own reading room. Because the Society is an historical depository, none of the materials in the Library Collections circulate outside the building. Many items in the collection are both fragile and rare and patrons are encouraged to handle all materials with care. Also, in order to measure patron usage of the Library Collections, all researchers are requested to register each day in the reading room they are using.

## TOURS

The State Historical Society welcomes group tours of its library facilities, provided that arrangements for these tours are made in advance. Please contact the Library Collections staff for details about tours.

## BOOK COLLECTION

The library contains more than 120,000 books and bound periodicals. Many of these volumes are on open shelves, directly accessible to public use. These include histories for every county in Iowa, a large genealogy collection, many historical journals, and a general reference collection. The library collections also include some rare and fragile books on Iowa, Midwestern, and American history. These books are kept in closed stacks. Access to them is gained through the use of the library's card catalog and the assistance of the staff. Books are classified according to the Library of Congress system. Patrons wishing to examine closed stacks materials need only fill out a call slip (including the volume's author, title, and complete call number) and give it to a librarian. Specialized bibliographies of materials from the Society collections relating to immigrant groups, blacks, women, and other Iowa topics are also available. The staff welcomes questions about both the book collection and the cataloging system.

## NEWSPAPER COLLECTION

Communities from all over Iowa are represented in the newspaper collection of over 10,000 bound volumes and 12,000 rolls of microfilm. The collection spans the period from 1836 to the present, and includes some foreign language and special interest newspapers published in the state. A particularly helpful aid for researchers, the *Bibliography of Iowa Newspapers, 1836-1976*, lists all of the Society's newspaper holdings, and the newspaper holdings of other depositories around the state. The bibliography is also available for purchase from the Society for \$9.25, postpaid.

## CENSUS COLLECTION

There are over 2,300 rolls of microfilmed census records in the library collection. Iowa census materials include the 1840 through 1910 federal schedules, and state schedules for the years 1856, 1885, 1895, 1915, and 1925. Iowa industrial, social, agricultural, and mortality schedules and statistics are available for 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880. Federal schedules are also available for many other states, 1790 to 1860. States to the east of Iowa, particularly areas which people left to come to Iowa provide the focus for the Society's out of state census collection. Indexes to many of these schedules are available and are shelved near the census microfilm. The library also owns the microfilm soundex indexes to the 1880 and 1900 federal censuses of Iowa. Convenient printed forms for recording census data are available at the library reference desk at a nominal cost to patrons.

## MAP COLLECTION

The library collects any maps that deal with Iowa. Among the maps in the



library collection are those showing land ownership, railroad routes, roads and highways, and bird's-eye views of various cities and towns. There is a large fire insurance map collection of over 700 Iowa cities and towns. These large-scale maps were drawn during the period from 1874 to 1970, and depict the commercial, industrial, and residential sections of each town. A recent State Historical Society publication, *Fire Insurance Maps of Iowa Cities and Towns: A List of Holdings*, records the Society's collection. This publication is available for purchase from the Society for \$3.25, postpaid.

### MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

The Society's manuscript collection is one of the main depositories in the state for preserving and making available to researchers the original source materials that provide the record of Iowa's history. The collection consists of more than 2,500 linear feet of personal papers and records of organizations such as schools, churches, clubs, businesses, and labor unions. Personal papers include diaries, account books, letters, reminiscences, and other unpublished materials from Iowa citizens. Manuscript collections vary in size from a single item to almost two hundred boxes, as in the case of the papers of turn of the century Iowa congressman Jonathan P. Dolliver. Collections of broadsides, unbound maps, sheet music, art work, advertisements, programs, and oral history recordings and transcripts are also located in the Society's manuscript collections.

### PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

The photograph collection includes over 100,000 images reflecting the history of the state of Iowa, as well as the experiences of Midwesterners generally. The photographs are arranged under standard subject headings, but can also be located by geographical designations. Portraits are filed alphabetically with a card catalog as an index. Reproductions or photocopies of photographs can be obtained by patrons. A price list is available. If a photograph is reproduced for commercial or profit-making use, the Society charges a use fee. This fee applies only to photographs actually published, displayed, or broadcast. This fee does not apply to photographs ordered for research or personal use.

### GIFTS

The State Historical Society is responsible for collecting and preserving materials relating to Iowa's heritage. The contributions of friends and members of the Society are very important for fulfilling this responsibility. Photographs, manuscripts, maps, newspapers, family histories, centennial publications, county and local histories, and other materials are welcome. The library may also be able to photograph, photocopy, or microfilm an item for its collections if the owner is willing to temporarily loan the original to the Society for this purpose. Please address correspondence regarding gifts to the Head Librarian.

### COPY SERVICE

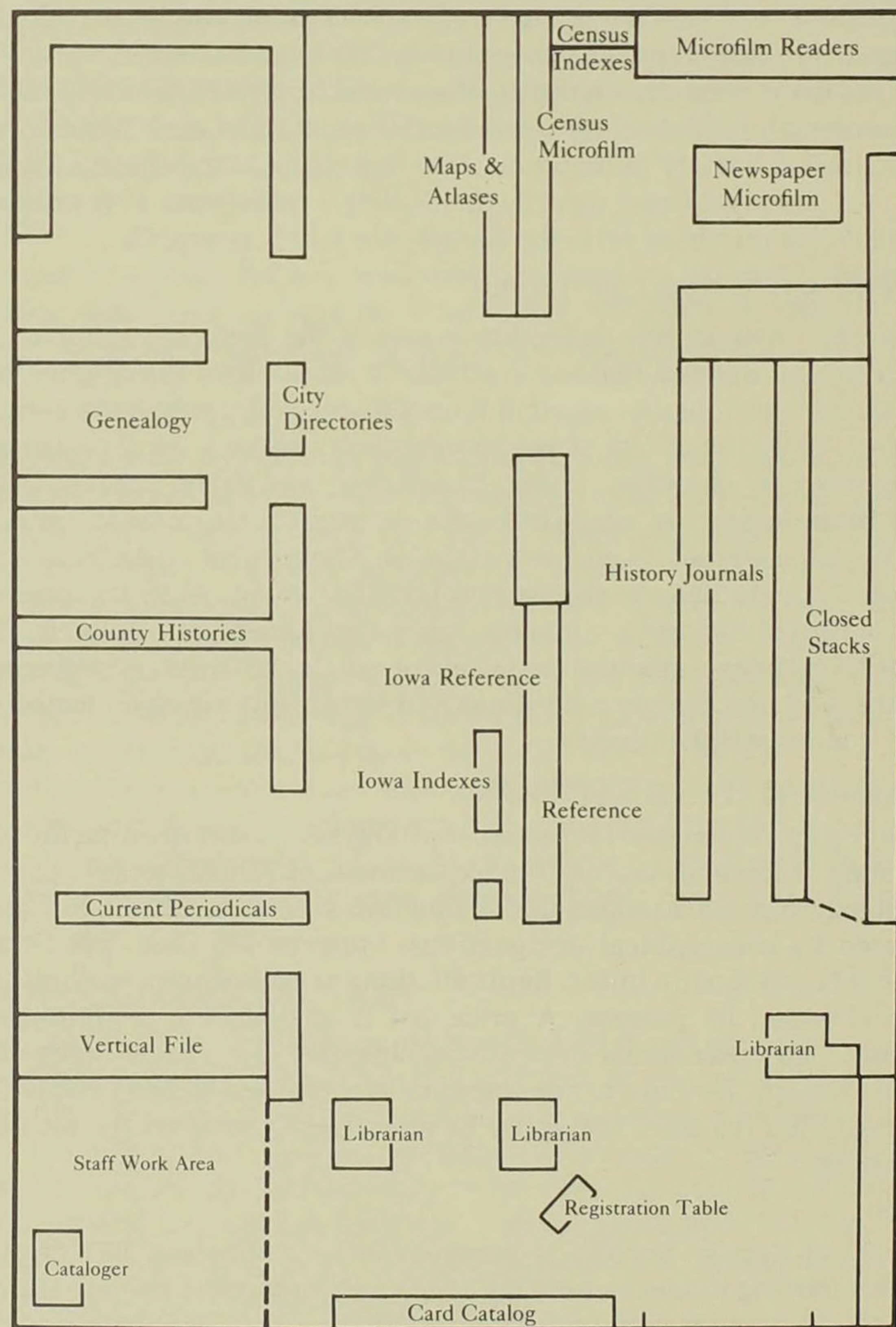
The Society provides photocopying services for all types of materials, unless the item requested is too fragile to photocopy safely. There is a service charge if a copy request takes over one half hour of staff time. Charges for photocopies and all other services are listed on a fees schedule sheet available on request from the Society.

### INTERLIBRARY LOAN

The library provides interlibrary loan service to and from other institutions. The Society library must hold two copies of an item before a loan of material to



## The State Historical Society's First Floor Library Plan



another institution can be negotiated. The exception to this rule is the Society's microfilmed newspaper collection, all of which is available for loan. There is a limit of two items per loan, and these may be kept by the borrowing institution for two weeks. If more time is needed to use the borrowed material it is usually possible to receive a renewal of the loan. All borrowed material must be used in the institution to which it is sent.

### OUT OF TOWN RESEARCHERS

The Office of the State Historical Society is located in Iowa City at 402 Iowa Avenue, near the campus of the University of Iowa. Metered parking is available near the Society building, and there are eating places within walking distance. Most motel accommodations are in the adjoining city of Coralville. The Iowa City and Coralville chambers of commerce can provide information about motel accommodations. The "Iowa House," at the University of Iowa's Memorial Union, is conveniently located for library users.



## The New Deal: Viewed From Fifty Years

On April 22 the Center for the Study of the Recent History of the United States sponsored its fourth conference in Iowa City. This year's topic, "The New Deal: Viewed From Fifty Years," drew leading scholars of the New Deal period, teachers of American history in Iowa colleges and universities, and other people interested in the recent history of the United States together for a lively daylong discussion of the New Deal's impact on Iowa, the Midwest, and the United States generally. The program speakers included Bernard Sternsher, Professor of History, Bowling Green State University, "Assessing the New Deal: The Short Run and the Long Run"; Elliot A. Rosen, Professor of History, Rutgers University, "The Midwestern Opposition to the New Deal"; and Alan Jones, Professor of History, Grinnell College, "The New Deal Comes to Iowa." Richard S. Kirkendall, Henry A. Wallace Professor of History, Iowa State University, served as program commentator. The after-dinner speaker was Otis L. Graham, Jr., Kenan Professor of History, University of North Carolina, whose topic was "The Planning Idea from Roosevelt to Post-Reagan."

The Center for the Study of the Recent History of the United States is a cooperative undertaking involving the Iowa State Historical Department/Office of the State Historical Society, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, and the University of Iowa. The Center was organized in 1975, when it was recognized by representatives of the three constituent institutions that "their libraries together hold resources outstanding for the general field and unrivaled for the 1920-33 period, that Iowa City-West Branch stands at the geographical center of mid-America's other major collections in the field, and that joint action would allow them to undertake projects beyond the reach of any one of the three institutions." The Center has published the papers from its first three conferences, and plans to publish the papers from the recent conference as well. Information about the purchase of these volumes may be obtained from the Publications Order Department, Oakdale Campus, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242. Funding for the April 1983 conference was provided by the Procter & Gamble Fund, Cincinnati, Ohio; the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association; and the University of Iowa Foundation.

## Selected Recent Manuscript Acquisitions

Stone, William M. "History of the 22nd Iowa Volunteer Infantry." n.d. 73p. photocopy of holograph.

First person handwritten narrative history of the 22nd Iowa Volunteer Infantry by the man who served as colonel of the unit and from 1864 to 1868 as governor of Iowa. Includes maps and detailed accounts of formation of unit and campaigns and service at Rolla and southeastern Missouri, Vicksburg, Port Gibson, and Jackson, Mississippi, the Red River campaign in Louisiana, and the Shenandoah Valley campaign in Virginia. Also includes an undated speech by Governor Stone to the men of the 22nd Iowa. Donor: Dr. A.L. Sahs.

Streeter, Alonzo O. Letter. 11 December 1869. Delantia, Iowa. 1p. photocopy of typescript transcription. Letter from Alonzo Streeter at Delantia, Iowa, to his brother, Augustus Streeter, at Westfield, Pennsylvania. Includes a description of Delantia, its advantages and future prospects for growth. Good account of local business conditions. Donor: Mr. James C. Streeter.

Shelley, Eugene E. The Amana Society, Old and New, née The Ebenezer Society, née The Community of True Inspiration. 25p. photocopy of typescript. Speech delivered before the York Junto Club, York, Pennsylvania, 27 September 1982, by Eugene Shelley. Includes theological origins of the Amana Society; early leaders; migration from Europe to New York and on to Iowa; rules, characteristics, customs, growth, and changes; 1932 transition to corporate organization; and Amana today. Donor: Eugene Shelley.

Iowa Colony. Pamphlet. c. 1908. 16p. photocopy. Pamphlet entitled "Iowa Colony" published by the Emigration Land Company of Des Moines and Houston about 1908 to attract settlers to farm lands for sale near Houston, Texas. Donor: Mr. Mike Zahs.

Narber, Gregg Ross. New Deal Murals Projects in Iowa, by Gregg Ross Narber and Sandra Lea DeLong. Annotated lecture, 1982. 36p. photocopies of typescript, footnotes, appendices, and letter of donation. History of the government support of painting of murals in Iowa between 1934 and 1942. Lecture was accompanied by slide projection pictures of most of the fifty murals painted under New Deal programs in Iowa. Includes the artists and their ideas, the government programs involved, the role of Grant Wood and the concept of regionalist painting. Donor: Mr. Gregg Ross Narber.



- Tade, E.O. Memoir, 1894. 8p. photocopy of typescript. Memoir in form of a letter addressed to brother and sister recounts experiences of family pioneering in Black Hawk Purchase in 1835. Family settled near Augusta, Iowa. Includes encounters with Indians, planting and first crop, breaking prairie, horse racing. Donor: SHSI Publications Department.
- Lettow, Gary and Lucille. Memoirs from Eden. The Life and Times of Joseph Lawless, 1842-1924. 1 folder (20p. typescript plus photocopies of photographs). Biography of early Hardin County pioneer based primarily on his memoir written over the years 1889 to 1916. Lawless was born in Ireland in 1842 and emigrated to Wisconsin with his family in 1847. Includes accounts of travels in Iowa in 1864, inspections of lands, settlement in Hardin County in 1867, building a farm and raising a family. Donor: Gary and Lucille Lettow.
- Miller, Dorothy. Medicine and Medical Practices in Washington County, Iowa, 1930-1949: The Case of Dr. M.L. McCreedy. M.A. essay, Department of History, University of Iowa, 1982. 40p. photocopy of typescript. Study concentrates on attitudes, early medical practices and the development of modern hospitals and nursing attitudes in Washington County, Iowa, during the years 1930 to 1950. The focus is on the career of Dr. McCreedy of Brighton, Iowa. Includes a brief biography of Dr. McCreedy, general and local medical statistics, medical conditions in Brighton, Iowa, roles of druggist, osteopath, and chiropractor, folk remedies, efforts to improve public health, doctors' incomes, effects of economic depression and World War II, epidemics, acceptance of immunization. Includes footnotes and bibliography. Donor: SHSI Publications Department.
- Atwood, Roy. Newspapermen as Telephonemen: Interlocking Iowa Newspaper and Telephone Company Directorates, 1900-1917. 25p. photocopy of typescript. Research paper presented at West Coast Journalism History Conference, San Francisco, California, February 27-28, 1982. Study "traces some of the interlocking newspaper and telephone company directorates in Iowa, one of the leading states in independent telephony." Research focuses on degree to which newsmen were involved in the establishment, maintenance, and direction of independent telephone operations. Concentrates on Washington, Johnson, and Iowa counties. Donor: Mr. Roy Atwood.
- Thomas, Richard. A Brief History of Mount Vernon, Iowa. 1973. 31p. typescript. A short history of Mt. Vernon, Iowa, includes historiography, notes, and bibliography. Traces growth of community with emphasis on developments of 1920 to 1970. Local history is presented in context of state and national history. Donor: SHSI Publications Department.
- Ministerial Union of Iowa City. Constitution and minutes of meetings, 1889-1910. 1 vol. holograph. Donor: Mr. Robert O. Moninger.
- Johnson County Coroner's Record, 1896-1911. 217p. photocopy of 1 holograph volume. Includes names, dates, and causes of death and accounts of expenses and verdicts of inquisitions. Donor: Eileen Wharton.
- Venus, Christine. Letters. 1853-1866. 12p. holograph. Four letters in German to Christine Venus, wife of Joseph Venus, at the Communia Settlement in Clayton County, Iowa, from her hometown of St. Genevieve, Missouri. Donor: Miss Louise Leers.
- Ayers, Lieutenant Oliver C. Diary. 1862-1864. 32p. photocopy of typescript transcription. Journal of a soldier in the 39th Iowa Volunteer Infantry. Includes formation of unit, election of officers, service at Cairo, Illinois, Columbus, Kentucky, Jackson, Humbolt, Trenton, Lexington, Chattanooga and Huntingdon, Tennessee, Corinth, Mississippi, Athens, Huntsville, and Sarkinville, Alabama, and Snakes Gap, Georgia. Detailed account of battle of Parker's Cross Roads, December 31, 1863, and descriptions of travels, camp life, skirmishing, foraging, rations, hardships, and duties of a quartermaster. Donor: Mr. Dale S. Snair.
- Doolittle, Agnes. "Dig a Flea: A History of Early Education in Dickinson County, Iowa." 93p. typescript. 1956. Written by Agnes Doolittle and a committee of Chi Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma. Donor: Joanne Volpe Florino.
- Programs. 1876-1887. Sixty-eight printed programs for meetings of the Hamline, Ruthean, and Philomathean Literary Societies of Iowa Wesleyan University and Mt. Pleasant Public High School. Also miscellaneous functions and events connected with Iowa Wesleyan University, the Mt. Pleasant Public Schools, and the Henry County Normal Institutes. Donor: Mrs. Charles E. Hill.



1909.

Mabray operated what was known as a "Big Store." Toward the end of his career it was located on the third floor of the Merriam Building in Council Bluffs. From his "Big Store" Mabray controlled an army of "steerers," whose work consisted primarily of finding the "mikes," or victims. It has been estimated that Mabray had as many as 200 steerers working for him. The victims they sought were simply men with ready money. As Mabray pointed out in a letter to one of his steerers: "No matter who he is, or what he is, the only question that you need answer is: 'Has he got money?' We will take care of the rest."

Mabray's confidence in himself was borne out by his record. He separated from their money such disparate types as farmers, bank-

ers, lawyers, even gamblers and newspapermen. His procedure seldom varied. In his "Big Store" he had men or animals that one could wager on. They were, indeed, rather special men and animals that one could simply not afford not to wager on. For example, there was Red Leo, an unbeatable horse, which unfortunately never won a race. There was Harry Forbes, one-time bantamweight champion, whose art in the ring was clearly superior to that of any against whom he might be matched. Mabray had jockeys, sprinters, wrestlers, boxers, and perhaps even a sculler or two. All of them were highly skilled.

The con was relatively simple and worked time and time again. A steerer would find a mike who perhaps had never gambled on



*The Merriam Block was the location of J.C. Mabray's "Big Store." From there he corresponded with his steerers throughout the country.*



much of anything in his life. But he would have money and he would ultimately agree to do a small favor which seemingly did not involve any of his money at all. He would be told about a group of millionaires somewhere who had a disgruntled employee who was seeking to even matters with them. He would be told that the millionaires were all sports and that they had a racehorse which occasionally they put up against other horses. The disgruntled employee would then be described as having found a horse (Red Leo) which could easily take the millionaires' nag. What he needed was someone to go to Council Bluffs and bet the horse for him. That was the favor. The honest man was asked to do nothing more than pose as a substantial businessman. That was necessary because the millionaires would never deal with gamblers. It was then pointed out that the honest man should bring along a draft for several thousand dollars, just to let the millionaires feel very comfortable about their betting opponent.

Once in Council Bluffs, it was a fairly simple matter to let the mike have a look at the millionaires' horse in a workout and then let him have a more important look at Red Leo in a workout. In an age when men prided themselves on being judges of horseflesh, it might not take much more for the honest man to have cashed his draft and asked for a piece of the action. His first and perhaps even his second request for such a piece might be denied but ultimately he was begrudgingly given what he wanted. In short order the bets were placed with the millionaires, the date and place of the race were decided upon, after which the parties repaired to some spot, probably near Lake Manawa, where an illegal horse race was staged. The race would go off as expected, with Red Leo building up a sizable lead on the millionaires' horse until that key moment in the home stretch when Red Leo's jockey would rise in the stirrups, gurgle out some horrible noise, and fall to the track. While the horses

crossed the finish line (with Red Leo the loser since he crossed the line without his jockey) everyone would run to the fallen rider. He would be obviously dying, or already dead, with blood flowing from his mouth. Thus it was time for everyone to beat a hasty exit from the scene. No one and, most particularly, no honest man wanted to be involved in explaining an illegal race which had ended with the death of a jockey. Consequently, it didn't take any convincing to send the honest man on his way. Soothing words would be spoken to him to the effect that everything would be worked out and that the millionaires certainly wouldn't be sticklers. The poor mike was assured that if he went home he would soon be contacted, and his portion of the wager would be returned.

Sometimes he was contacted. In at least one case, a man was set up for a rematch which



*John C. Mabray often posed as a millionaire for the victims of his confidence schemes.*



went exactly like the first race. Sometimes the honest man wasn't contacted. But what could he do? Let us suppose that he was a banker. What sort of banker would publicize his financial acumen by admitting he had been taken in such a way? Some mikes worried about the law; some mikes even felt a sense of shame which was often infinitely increased by the suggestion that the pot had been short, that the disgruntled employee had held out on the mike when he made the bet with the millionaires, and that the discovery had made the millionaires very angry indeed. However it was, the mikes seldom felt like raising legal issues themselves and were most often prepared to swallow their losses and forget the whole thing.

The beauty of the "Big Store" was that one could accomplish the same thing using a wrestling match, a boxing match, a footrace, or whatever seemed to be most proper to the individual victim. The result was the same in any case. The gullible mike was let in on a mismatch or a fix or even a fixed mismatch. He was shown a sure thing. He was shown something that would prove irresistible to almost anyone. His money did become involved and then came the magic moment when, with victory within plucking distance, one's jockey, or one's boxer, or one's wrestler, or one's footracer, or whatever, simply bit down on a little sack of chicken blood which he carried in his mouth, and fell dead (of a hemorrhage) before the astonished principals. All of this was then followed by panic and flight with no time for reflection or clear thinking.

How lonely it was to be the victim of such a con. Practically no victim received any sympathy. In an editorial in the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* on 26 February 1909 the lack of sympathy was made abundantly clear:

*Who has the first speck of sympathy for their victims? Nobody. The essence of the plot is always the same, or nearly so — the*

*man eventually bumped is led to believe that he is to reap the benefit of bumping someone else, or, at least, is to be but an innocent lay figure. Avarice overreaches itself, cunning over-estimates itself, the man who would rob another is suddenly himself robbed. So, there is no sympathy for him.*

The writer of the editorial was quick to point out, however, that "this mitigates not at all the culpability of the swindlers."

\* \* \*

The con was relatively simple, the game was capable of being played almost endlessly, and J.C. Mabray enjoyed almost a decade of living off the fruits of other men's greed. But in early 1909 the whole fabric of his operation began to come apart. It began to waver when a steerer by the name of John R. Dobbins was indicted on a charge of larceny in connection with a fake horse race which led one T.W. Ballew of Princeton, Missouri, to lose some \$30,000 of his money.

Shortly after the indictment of Dobbins and his extradition from New York, Mabray and several of his confederates were arrested in Little Rock, Arkansas. Suddenly mikes began to emerge from various points with stories of how they had been bilked. There was the Denver saloonkeeper who had been taken for \$5,000, or the twelve gentlemen who were escorted to Little Rock to identify Mabray as the individual who had swindled them, or the gentleman from Cisco, Illinois, who also went to Little Rock. By mid-July numerous mikes began filing lawsuits in the hopes of recovering some of their losses through the courts. Mikes seemed to be materializing everywhere. There were mikes from Colorado, from Illinois, from Indiana and Missouri, and from as far away as Michigan and Pennsylvania.

But the major indictment was handed down by a federal grand jury against John C. Mabray



and some eighty of his confederates in September 1909. Mabray et al. were charged with using the mails to defraud. Postal Inspector J.S. Swenson had been working on the Mabray case for over two years and had done a remarkably thorough job.

The Post Office Department had been inundated in the first years of the twentieth century by a vast increase in crimes involving the mails. Cases involving fraud included "fake land schemes, commission-merchant swindles, the selling of worthless goods through misrepresentation, brokerage swindles, the obtaining of goods under false pretenses, the selling of unfair gambling devices, matrimonial schemes, the defrauding of insurance companies for alleged injuries, the green-goods swindle (counterfeiting), and the selling of diplomas and requiring of little or no study before granting them."

There were, according to one report, some seventy different fraudulent schemes for which people were convicted by the courts in but a single year. Inspector Swenson's work on the Mabray case was noteworthy, however, and got very favorable mention in the report of the chief inspector for the fiscal year ending 30 June 1910.

*A very important case recently handled by post-office inspectors covered the operations of the so-called Mabray gang. The first complaints were made to the department about two years ago, and investigation disclosed that the business of what was believed to have been the most gigantic scheme of this kind with which the postal inspectors have had to contend was operated on a large scale by an organization of confidence men by means of fake horse races, athletic contests, etc.*

*The swindle was perpetrated successfully in various parts of the United States,*

*and victims in all parts of the United States were robbed of sums varying from \$1,000 to \$30,000. It is estimated that the promoters secured approximately \$5,000,000.*

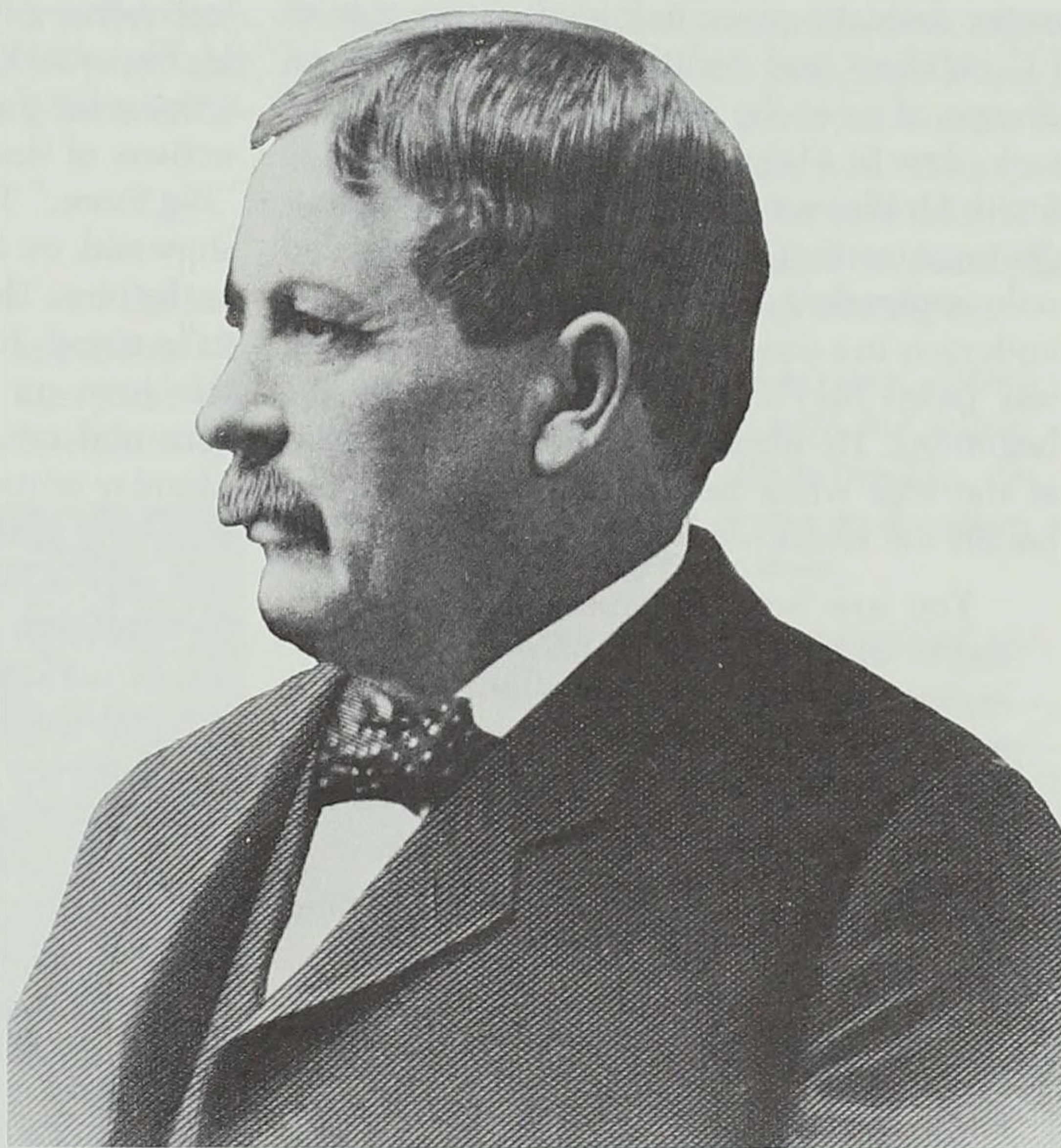
\* \* \*

Thus was the stage set for the trials in late 1909 and early 1910 which would effectively lead to the closure of John C. Mabray's "Big Store" and the incarceration in federal penitentiary of not only Mabray but the bulk of his associates as well. One of the first trials was that of John R. Dobbins. The Dobbins trial began on 15 November 1909 with the state charging that Dobbins had participated in a fake horse race swindle which had cost one T.W. Ballew some \$30,000. Dobbins retained a quartet of lawyers including Ed Mulick from Davenport and Charles Harl, Emmet Tinley, and George S. Wright from Council Bluffs. J.J. Hess, the county attorney, was flanked by State Attorney General H.W. Byers, and John P. Organ who represented Ballew, the state's prime witness.

Ballew's story was one that would be repeated over and over again in state and federal courts in the years 1909 and 1910. He had been swindled in a fake horse race which had taken place near Council Bluffs, Iowa. Ballew himself was described in one newspaper as a "millionaire banker, lumberman, and capitalist." He was a wealthy man from Princeton, Missouri, who had known the defendant, John R. Dobbins, for many years. As a matter of fact, it turned out that Dobbins owed Ballew a little money, something in the neighborhood of \$400. But Dobbins had moved to Kansas City where Ballew had run into him in the summer of 1908. Not too long afterwards, on 5 October 1908, Ballew had been presented with a letter of introduction from Dobbins by a man named Walter H. Martin who had a proposition for Ballew about a horse race. Ballew was a man who never followed the horses or gambled but



*A seasoned veteran of courtroom frays, Federal Judge Smith McPherson had acquired almost forty years of experience in the legal profession before the trial of John C. Mabray and his confederates in 1910.*



Martin persuaded him to have a talk with Dobbins before giving a final "no" to his proposition.

In Kansas City, on 7 October 1908, the usual little story had been spun out for Ballew. It was a story about some millionaires who traveled about with a horse and who liked to bet with gentlemen of means — not gamblers. It was a story about Dobbins' and Martin's need for a substantial person to represent them in Council Bluffs in a betting transaction on what was clearly a sure thing. It was a story which even included a disgruntled millionaires' secretary who was in with Martin on the race.

Ballew, however distinguished and conservative a gentleman he might have been, called some banks in St. Joseph and arranged to have drafts totaling \$30,000 forwarded to banks in Omaha. Ultimately, his money was bet on a horse which was obviously Red Leo. The race

came off with the usual results. Red Leo lost the race, a jockey supposedly lost his life, and T.W. Ballew certainly lost his money. John R. Dobbins had been a model steerer. He found a mike who knew him well enough to place a modicum of trust in him. He plied him with the dream of having a long overdue loan paid off, with receiving ten percent of everything that he (Dobbins) and Martin might win in a race, and he even threw in the pious possibility that Ballew's trust and aid would result in Dobbins giving up gambling forever. Steered to Council Bluffs, Ballew played it all out and the Mabray operation came away with \$30,000.

**D**obbins was found guilty of grand larceny and sentenced to the state penitentiary at Fort Madison. The Dobbins trial was but a beginning, however. Other steerers were tried in late 1909, but it was in early 1910 that the



major dramatic piece unfolded — the trial of J.C. Mabray and eighteen co-defendants on charges of using the mails to defraud. The trial took place in March 1910, with Federal Judge Smith McPherson presiding. Two of the defendants got continuances and three more pleaded *nolo contendere* but the trial eventually got underway in a courtroom that was well filled. It was Judge McPherson's courtroom from the beginning. He made that plain on the first day of the trial when he pointed out to his five bailiffs the seriousness of their duties.

*You are here to preserve order. It ought not to be necessary for me to repeatedly interrupt this trial to secure order. If you see anyone making a disturbance, caution them, and if they repeat the offense, call attention to the fact.*

The judge then went on to admonish them further:

*Another thing, when other judges or attorneys visit the court room they are entitled to places within the bar. I saw another judge enter the courtroom yesterday and you shoved him into one of the back seats. When ladies enter the court room they are to be escorted to seats inside the bar. That is a standing order of this court.*

But the judge reserved his finest comment for a witness who could not be heard by the jury. When the witness claimed that his weak voice was due to a headache, Judge McPherson simply replied: "Speak up. I usually talk loudest when I have a headache."

Witness after witness either told a story of how they had lost their money or how they had bilked people, since the state managed to put a few steerers on the stand. The parade of witnesses was an excessively long one. Approximately one hundred witnesses were originally scheduled to testify but their

testimony proved too repetitive for Judge McPherson. Finally, on 16 March 1910, the last witness for the state regaled the court with his notions of the operation of John C. Mabray's "Big Store." The defense put on but a minimal show and, on 19 March 1910, the case was given to the jury. The speed of justice at the time has to be noted. Judge McPherson gave the case to the jury on a Saturday, the verdict was returned on Sunday, and on the following Monday sentences were meted out to the fourteen individuals who had been found guilty by the jury. Two defendants had been granted continuances and two others had been acquitted in mid-trial when witnesses could not be brought from Canada to testify against them. On Tuesday the small contingent of twelve which was headed for Fort Leavenworth was marched to the railroad station and thus departed from the local scene. John C. Mabray and the majority of his co-defendants had all received sentences of two years imprisonment and a \$10,000 fine.

As Mabray and the others headed for Leavenworth, it was clear that the "Big Store" was effectively closed in Council Bluffs and its environs. During the remainder of 1910 former Mabray employees continued to be picked up, indicted, and tried throughout the Midwest. There were even some civil suits brought by victims against steerers and banks in the hopes of proving a conspiracy between the two which would allow the mikes to recoup their losses from the financial institutions which had cashed their drafts, issued them cashier's checks, and otherwise accommodated them in their mad desire to win on a sure thing. Judge McPherson had little patience with such attempts and the suits were thrown out. A few new witnesses enlivened the scene in the summer, however. Perhaps the most prominent was Thomas Cale, a one-time congressional delegate from Alaska who had been steered to Council Bluffs where he had lost \$8,000 on a wrestling match in July 1908. Cale had actually



been steered by a well-known wrestler, Jack Carkeek, whom Cale had known for years and with whose prowess Cale had long been familiar.

\* \* \*

John C. Mabray went to prison and did not seem particularly interested in appealing his conviction. He had evidently accepted his defeat in the courts almost philosophically.



*John C. Mabray probably took more than \$5,000,000 from his victims in the years before 1910.*

Perhaps Mabray more accurately than others spoke to the question of American national character when he made a few statements to the press, during and after his trial. Perhaps a few Mabray comments on human nature in general and American character in particular might strike a note well worth closing on.

*Let every man look into his own affairs and keep on the square with his fellow men and he will have little trouble. As soon as a man begins trying to do other people he is bound to be done.*

*Oh well, the mikes that convicted us were as guilty in intent as we.*

*There have been mikes since the world was born and there will be plenty of mikes in the end. Jacob was the first Biblical miker when he turned that little trick for getting the striped cattle. Jacob knew he wasn't exactly on the square. He would have made a good American.*

*Americans in business and baseball make all they can out of the rules. That was our game, too, but the court says it went too far.*

#### Note on Sources

It is difficult to find a satisfactory history of the flamboyant figures who worked the great confidence games of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jay Robert Nash offers an anecdotal introduction to the subject in his *Hustlers and Con Men* (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1976). Wayne E. Fuller's *The American Mail: Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) together with the Annual Reports of the Post Office Department for the years 1907 through 1911 provide a great deal of material on the United States Post Office Department's struggles to prevent the use of the mails for fraudulent purposes. The material on John C. Mabray and his "Big Store" was drawn largely from local newspapers, most importantly the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* and the *Omaha Bee*.



# John M. Work: Iowa Socialist

by William H. Cumberland

John M. Work passionately believed that the cure for mankind's ills was "Socialism! Brotherhood! Love!" Socialism was the next step in the evolution of humanity, he believed. Socialism would elevate man above the "sorrow, poverty, ignorance and anguish" which seemed so much a part of modern civilization. Work's faith led him to embark on a sixty-year crusade to make the Socialist dream a reality. The crusade began shortly after he read Laurence Gronlund's *The Cooperative Commonwealth*. A prime mover in establishing a Socialist group in Des Moines, Work was one of fifty delegates who gathered at the Oskaloosa courthouse in August 1902 to found the Social Democratic Party of Iowa.

\* \* \*

John Work was born and raised on a farm near Washington, Iowa. He graduated from Washington Academy and Monmouth College and received a law degree from Columbian (now George Washington) University. Settling in Des Moines in 1892, Work quickly became a member of the Young Republican Club and attended the club's 1893 national convention in Louisville, Kentucky. Two of the delegates were Iowans who were already on their way to state and national prominence, Jonathan P. Dolliver and Albert Baird Cummins. An ardent temperance man, Work was stunned when he witnessed Dolliver and other members of the Iowa delegation partaking of alcoholic beverages in Louisville. Work believed that all of the Iowa delegates should have

abstained since Iowa was a prohibitionist state. But Work was even more chagrined by the apparent lack of political morality in Louisville. He was particularly put off by the party chairman's suggestion that the representatives at polling places try "to close the polls a bit early in the strongly Democratic precincts and to try to hold them open a bit overtime in the strongly Republican precincts." It was not surprising that John M. Work did not remain long within such a party.

In the last years of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century many others were dissatisfied with the traditional political parties. Such dissatisfaction existed even though there was a measure of surface prosperity and progressive reform. The prosperity and reform simply did not touch enough people. As Socialist Robert Hunter pointed out in his book, *Poverty*, there were millions of people living below the subsistence level. Private ownership of farm land was giving way to an increase in tenant farming, disease was rampant in the urban slums, monopolies and trusts were the order of the day, wealth was being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, workers suffered from physical as well as economic hazards, women were denied participation in the political process, and there was no federal child labor law. Even though notions of social welfare were in their infancy, the consciousness of inequalities was rising. A number of American communities, large and small, began electing Socialist mayors and councilmen. By 1912 seventy-nine Socialist mayors had been elected in twenty-four states. In similar manner, the number of



elected Socialist officials at the county and state levels grew during this "Golden Age" of socialism.

**S**ocialist strength in Iowa was greater in these years than many have realized. By 1904 Iowa ranked seventeenth nationally in the percentage of Socialist voters. Voters in the coal mining regions of central and southern Iowa elected Socialist mayors and councilmen in such towns as Mystic, Bussey, and Hiteman. By 1910 Iowans had elected seventeen Socialist officials. Before the Socialist surge ended in the early 1920s, Socialist candidates ran strong races in major Iowa cities. Socialists were elected to the Muscatine city council for more

than a decade. A Socialist almost became mayor of Burlington, and Socialists captured the municipal government in Davenport in 1920.

There were men of considerable stature among the Iowa Socialists. One was Reverend George Herron, the controversial Professor of Applied Christianity at Iowa (Grinnell) College, who, like Work, was a founder of the Socialist party in Iowa. Herron left Iowa in 1901 to continue agitation on behalf of Socialist causes until his break with the party during World War I. His interest in social welfare and international peace was lasting, however, and he worked as a special representative of President Woodrow Wilson during the pre-armi-

*John M. Work's socialism was moderate, evolutionary, reformist, and stressed brotherhood rather than class antagonism. A founder of the Social Democratic Party of Iowa in 1902, Work was an unsuccessful candidate for mayor of Des Moines in 1902, for governor of Iowa in 1903, and again for governor in 1910.*





stice negotiations with Germany. There was also Allen W. Ricker, an old Populist crusader from Lone Tree, who wrote for the Socialist paper, *Appeal to Reason*, and helped organize Socialist locals throughout the nation. Authors Charles Edward Russell and Floyd Dell were also early Iowa Socialists. Dell never abandoned the Socialist cause, which he first encountered at Davenport at the turn of the century. Russell, however, like Herron, left the party because of its refusal to support America's participation in World War I. Irving S. McCrillis of Des Moines, a businessman and lifelong friend and correspondent of John Work, was also an early Iowa Socialist. But the architect of the party in Iowa and the most prominent Iowan working for the Socialist cause nationally was John M. Work.

John M. Work was not only a delegate to the Oskaloosa convention which founded the Socialist party in the state but was elected permanent secretary of the convention. He ran for mayor of Des Moines in 1902, for governor of the state in 1903 and again 1910, and campaigned for the United States Senate in 1908. The support Work received from Iowa locals enabled him to win election to the Socialist National Committee from 1903 to 1911. Ultimately, he became a member of the National Executive Committee, serving with such distinguished Socialists as Victor Berger, John Spargo, Morris Hillquit, Robert Hunter, Ernst Untermann, and Algie Simons. Throughout the first decade of the century Work was active in formulating both state and national policies of the Socialist party. In addition to writing campaign platforms for the Iowa Socialist party, he wrote the party's constitution, and wrote many resolutions adopted by the National Executive Committee.

During this period Work toured not only Iowa but the nation on behalf of the Socialist cause. He was instrumental in organizing dozens of locals, even in such unlikely places as

Orange City and Lake Park, as he toured the state depicting the utopia which would follow the collapse of capitalism. The *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, irritated by his remarks, wrote caustically that Work "gave lie to his name by advocating the three hour day." He offered to debate with any opponents from the traditional parties. Sometimes he had to deftly sidestep those who were prone to do violence to Socialist lecturers. In Denison, Iowa, while waiting at the train depot after a Sunday afternoon lecture, Work observed a man in a sulky, carrying a gun and crying out to a fellow townsman: "I'm looking for that Socialist candidate for Governor."

While Work was occasionally harassed by irate townsfolk in small Iowa communities, he was not often threatened or intimidated by public officials. This was not the case on his nationwide tours. In December 1907 the mayor of Chicago ordered Socialist speakers arrested even though they had obtained speaking permits from the chief of police. Work, fully expecting to be arrested, left his watch and other valuables at the Kaiserhof Hotel in preparation for the worst. He then spoke rapidly, determined to roast the mayor and the police before he was arrested. Surprisingly, his address was not halted and he collected donations of more than \$20 from his audience. In Waterville, New York, however, police punched him with a club and on several other occasions he was nearly arrested. But these were not uncommon hazards for people who challenged the system, and Work added hundreds of converts to the Socialist cause and gathered many subscriptions to the *Appeal* and *Wilshire's* magazine.

John Work was also an author and never ceased to believe that Socialist literature would play a major role in converting people to the cause. The most effective Socialist propaganda sheet at the time was probably the *Appeal to Reason*, published at Girard, Kan-



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## Socialist State Ticket

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For Governor,  
JOHN M. WORK,  
Des Moines.

For Lieutenant Governor,  
A. K. GIFFORD,  
Davenport.

For Judge of Supreme Court,  
I. S. McCRILLIS,  
Des Moines.

For Superintendent of Public Instruction,  
MRS. FLORENCE A. BROWN,  
Delta.

For Railroad Commissioner,  
OAKLEY WOOD,  
Lake City.

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*The Iowa Socialist served as one mouthpiece for the concerns of Iowa Socialists during the first decade of the twentieth century, Work included. In 1903 John M. Work conducted his first campaign for the office of governor of the state of Iowa.*

sas. There were numerous Socialist papers throughout the country, however, including the *Iowa Socialist* which was printed at Dubuque between 1902 and 1904. Work wrote a series of columns entitled "X Rays" which appeared in a variety of Socialist papers.

It was during the winter of 1904-1905 that Work turned out his most impressive literary piece. It was a terse, epigrammatic volume entitled *What's So and What Isn't*. The book was ninety-six pages in length, and in it Work hoped to explain to ordinary people what socialism was all about.

*What's So and What Isn't* went through four editions between 1906 and 1927 and sold over 200,000 copies. Although Socialist intellectuals such as Morris Hillquit objected to Work's

"primer style," Work found an audience among small town and rural Americans when he stressed the need for a more equitable social order. Work's socialism would eliminate exploitation but not the acquisition of capital or property justly gained or utilized for socially progressive purposes. An essential portion of his social philosophy was the work ethic, a concept understood equally by the Middle Americans who felt they had been denied the just fruits of their efforts and by the radicals within the Socialist party who were appalled at Work's moderation and his effort to play down class antagonism.

Indeed, Work nearly created an uproar at the 1908 Socialist party convention in Chicago when he suggested incorporating into the party



# X R A Y S

By JOHN M. WORK

*Work regularly expressed his ideas about socialism in columns published by Socialist papers. "X Rays" appeared in the Iowa Socialist periodically.*

platform assurances to independent farmers that the Socialist party did not wish "to deprive them of their little farms." Work argued that the small farmer, like the wage earner, was being exploited and asked why land needed to be publicly owned if it was not being used for exploitation. He further roused the ire of his more radical colleagues when he insisted that the "idea that Socialist principles lead to atheism or agnosticism is false." His critics charged that he confused public with collective ownership and that he was trying to win the support of middle class voters whose philosophy was closer to the Progressive movement. The radicals within the party wished to stand more boldly for revolution.

While the left wing of the party found Work's understanding of Socialist principles a bit insulting to the laboring man, his right-wing colleagues chafed at his constant emphasis that the party was an instrument of intellectual and moral uplift. Work often condemned capitalism as being responsible for drunkenness, crime, poverty, and prostitution, and he believed that Socialist goals should include ending the use of tobacco, alcohol, patent medicines, and even overindulgence in sexual intercourse. Work's puritanical moral values caused Allen W. Ricker to write in 1912, "I don't suppose Work ever tasted tobacco or liquor in his life, and if there is a conventional moral flaw in his make up the world has so far

failed to discover it." Over the decades Work remained a moderate vegetarian, a non-drinker, and a non-smoker.

His critics held that such views diverted the party from the true channels of Socialist activity. They claimed that Work had repudiated Marx and that his health fads and religious mysticism made him absurd. He tended to be castigated as a member of the right-wing extremists of the party.

Work's conservatism was seen in a chance encounter with the Socialist novelist Jack London during a party meeting in Toledo, Ohio, in 1905. They returned to Chicago on the same train and Work sensed the differences in their approach to socialism. London insisted on signing his letters "Yours for the Revolution," which the Iowan believed was an invitation to violence and, as such, it was likely to damage the cause. Work noted that "from the time I became a Socialist I was interested in preventing revolution, whereas he [London] was interested in fomenting a revolution." Perhaps Work would have been a revolutionist had there been no other way, but he could not be a revolutionist in the United States where civil liberties and wide suffrage were basically protected.

John Work attacked racial bigotry and, as early as 1900, he advocated not only woman's suffrage, but other forms of liberation for women. He once challenged Carrie Chapman Catt at a suffragist meeting in Des Moines



when she declared that the Socialists were against the suffrage amendment because "they thought it would delay Socialism for a thousand years." Work quietly arose at the end of the lecture and informed the audience that the Socialist platform had long endorsed woman's suffrage. At Marshalltown in 1906 he spoke ardently of even greater freedom for women, talking of such things as bobbed hair, short skirts, trousers, and complete economic independence. There should be, he stated, cooperative housekeeping and "those fitted by nature to cook should do the cooking." He even claimed that women should propose marriage as often as men did. Years later, Work would claim that he had been thirty years ahead of his time.

**Hear**  
**JOHN M. WORK,**  
**Socialist Candidate for**  
**GOVERNOR of IOWA,**  
 — AT —  
**TEMPLE HALL,**  
 Ninth and Locust Sts,  
 (First Floor)  
**DUBUQUE, IOWA,**  
**Wednesday Eve., Oct. 28**

*A campaign advertisement for Work's 1903 gubernatorial campaign.*

Work's demands for progressive, educational, and moral reforms detracted from the revolutionary goals of the left, however, since he sought to control the very class hatred which many of his critics hoped to sustain. Work was an evolutionary Socialist who believed in working through the processes of democracy. Socialism represented, for him, the highest state of democracy. He had no time, in later life, for the Bolshevik Revolution or the Communist party. Stalin's Russia appeared to Work as simply another form of totalitarianism.

His conservatism did not lessen his admiration for Eugene Debs, however, in spite of the Socialist leader's more radical ideological stance and his proclivity for profanity and booze. Work found Debs a "diamond in the rough," and described him as one whose qualities would mark him as one of the great men in history. Work assisted in the scheduling of the Red Special, the train which carried Debs across the nation during the presidential campaign of 1908. Both Work and Herron periodically traveled with Debs on that train. The 1908 campaign was one in which the Socialists doubled their vote nationally. In Iowa the Socialist vote reached new highs and the enthusiasm of the party remained great. Work tramped across Iowa in the early months of 1908, organizing several dozen locals, and recruiting hundreds to the Socialist cause.

Work also contributed to the efforts to free Bill Haywood, Charles Moyer, and George Pettibone, leaders of the Western Federation of Miners, who were charged with the murder of Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg. Work assisted in organizing protest meetings, and attended conferences with Clarence Darrow, the chief attorney for the men. Although Work believed the men to be innocent, he resisted a move to nominate Haywood as the Socialist candidate for president following his acquittal. He also opposed a nationwide tour for Haywood to visit Socialist locals lest the tour spark a



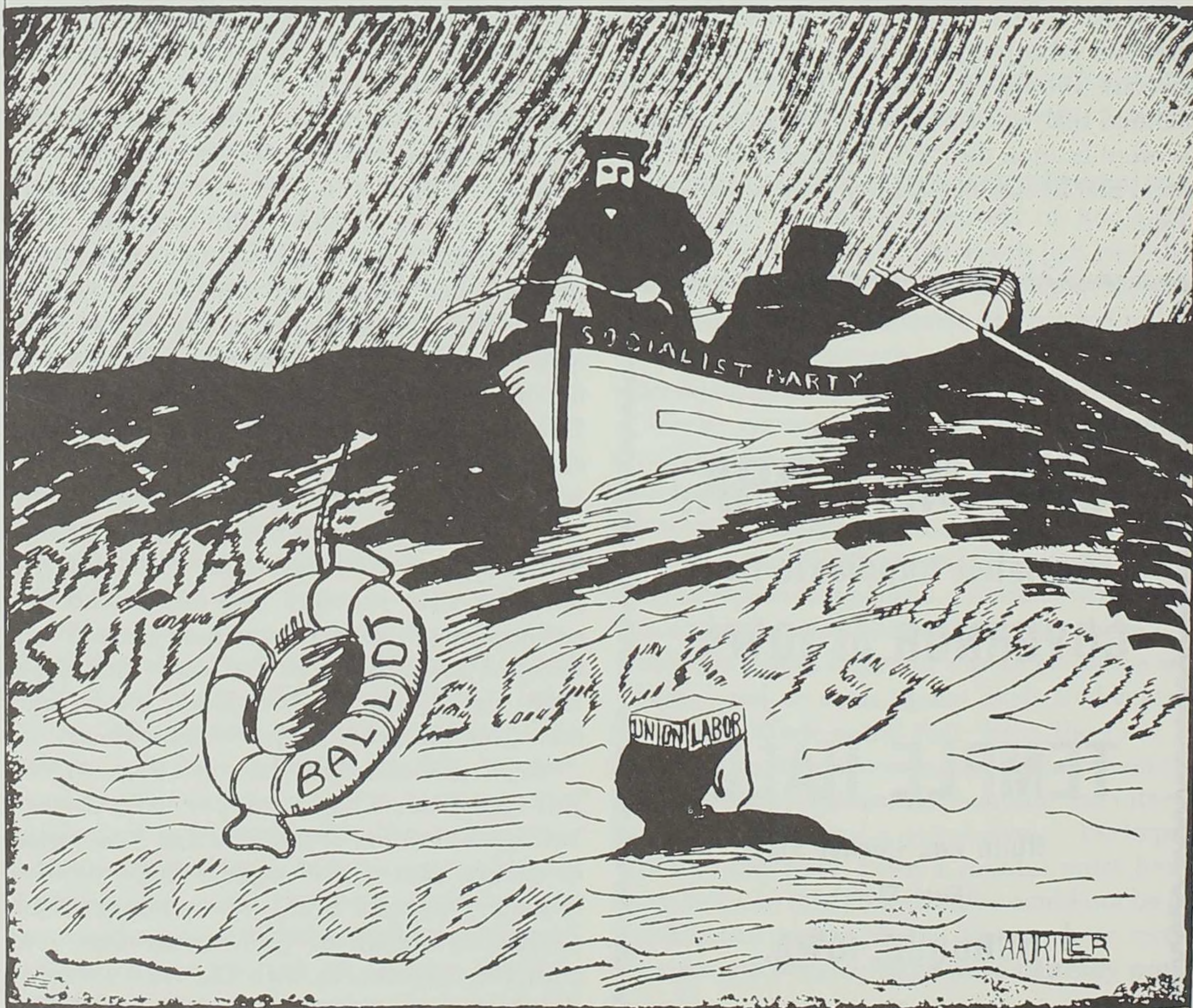
nominating movement.

John Work's western tours also brought him into contact with Tom Mooney, who was later convicted of bombing a San Francisco Preparedness Day parade in 1916 and sentenced to life imprisonment. Work met Mooney in western Washington in 1908, where Mooney was

selling subscriptions to *Wilshire's* magazine, hoping to win his way to a Socialist congress at Copenhagen. Work later wrote that he had sensed Mooney's essential radicalism. He added, "I did not admire him, but I believed him to be innocent of that charge."

When Work left Iowa in 1910 the future of

### A Labor Day Suggestion for Election Day



### A Hint to the Wise is Sufficient

An editorial cartoon published during the 1903 campaign suggested the limited options available to the working man.



# The Tide at the Flood



Written for  
THE IOWA  
SOCIALIST  
By  
JOHN M. WORK  
of Des Moines

the party seemed promising. There were now 908 dues-paying members of the Socialist party in the state. The size of the party had nearly doubled in five years. In the extremely successful election of 1912, Eugene Debs received 17,000 Iowa votes for president. Although Work had never won an elective office in Iowa, he was convinced that socialism was the political and economic system of the future. He described the years that he had spent "Touring for Socialism" in Iowa as an "enlightening and broadening experience." The effort the Socialists had put forth in Iowa, he claimed, was of immense educational value and that "we Socialists had educated millions of the people in the right direction."

John M. Work's Socialist career was just beginning when he left Iowa for Chicago. He served two frustrating years as National Party Secretary, 1911 to 1913. He always believed that the "impossibilists" or radicals had railroaded him out of that position. Nevertheless, Work remained loyal to the party and his crusading spirit was not dampened. He ran for elective office in Illinois as he had in Iowa, with similar results. For several years he instructed at La Salle Extension College in Chicago, while continuing to lecture and write. Then, in May 1917, he was invited by Victor

Berger to become the editor of the *Milwaukee Leader's* editorial page. He accepted and held the post for the next twenty-five years.

Work was an editorial writer when the *Leader* and its publisher, Victor Berger, were charged by the government with violating the Espionage and Sedition Act. The accusations stemmed from war hysteria and were part of the government's often misguided efforts to crack down on dissenters. Berger was convicted, although the conviction was later overturned in a higher court. Work actually claimed that he had written four of the five editorials attributed to Berger by the prosecution. He waited daily for an indictment but it never came. He continued to protest against the war while trying to stay within the law, a process which he described as a "difficult but thrilling episode in his life." It should be noted, however, that his opposition to World War I did not extend to American participation in either World War II or the Korean conflict which he felt were justified responses to obvious tyrannies.

In May 1942 his newspaper career came to an end. He was seventy-three years of age. During the twilight of his life, he continued attending Socialist meetings, tried his hand at writing novels, and served on the boards of the Commonwealth Mutual Savings Bank and the Mil-





## Necessity for Organization

John M. Work, National Committeeman



waukee Public Library. He kept his mind alert through reading, through dabbling with his old hobbies of health fads and mysticism, and through a spirited correspondence with his old Des Moines colleague, Irving S. McCrillis.

John M. Work died in Milwaukee in January 1961 at the age of ninety-two. His boyhood had been spent on an Iowa farm during the years of mounting depression and Populist agitation. He was deeply imbued with the Protestant work ethic and with puritan moral values. He imposed upon himself a rigorous self-discipline and he possessed a high desire for efficiency and organization which he urged other party members to imitate. "Disorganized and undisciplined Socialists," he wrote, "no matter how heroic and liberty loving are no match for the capitalist class." His socialism was moderate, evolutionary, reformist, and stressed brotherhood rather than class antagonism. These were the qualities which led his enemies to charge that he was essentially a warmed-over Progressive. Indeed, Work shared the Progressives' desire to curb monopolies, to ferret out corruption in government, and to emphasize social justice and faith in democracy. He shared their essential moralism. But the Progressives sought reform to bring

changes without ending the system. John M. Work advocated a new system—a system of democratic socialism. Although he was no revolutionary, he was more than a "gas and water Socialist." His strong rhetoric and his steadfast loyalty to the party during the difficult days of World War I indicate clearly the degree of his commitment. Philosophically, he was close to the modern Social Democrats of Western Europe. He remained a modest yet determined man, the possessor of a "quiet but immense courage." John M. Work was perhaps just what one might expect an Iowa Socialist to be. □

### Note on Sources

Many sources were consulted in the preparation of this article, including John M. Work's autobiography (at the Wisconsin State Historical Society), a collection of his papers (at the Milwaukee Public Library), and a number of his published works (among them *What's So and What Isn't*). Iowa newspapers, the *Oskaloosa Herald* and the *Davenport Democrat*, offered additional information. Socialist publications proved especially helpful, notably the *Iowa Socialist*, *Appeal to Reason*, and the *Socialist Weekly Bulletin*. Other valuable sources included Ira Kipnis' *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (Columbia University Press, 1952), Bruce M. Stave's *Socialism and the Cities* (Kennikat Press, Port Washington, 1975), and Floyd Dell's *Homecoming* (Kennikat Press, Port Washington, 1969).



## EDITOR'S NOTE

A caption was inadvertently omitted for one of the photographs which appeared in H. Roger Grant's May/June PALIMPSEST article, "The Railroad Station Agent in Small-Town Iowa." The caption below the photograph on page 94 should have read: "Lohrville's Chicago Great Western station, c. 1905, shortly after the line opened. (courtesy the author)."

Additionally, William C. Lang, author of the May/June PALIMPSEST article about higher education in Cedar Falls, alerted the editor to an error which appeared in his article. On page 79 it was stated incorrectly that in 1918 Iowa Governor W. L. Harding "issued an edict, later declared unconstitutional by the State Supreme Court, which prohibited the use of anything but English as a medium of instruction in all schools and which also required that all individuals and groups, regardless of their native tongue use English in conversations in public or on the telephone, in public addresses or church services." As Professor Lang pointed out to the editor, it was not the Iowa governor's edict which was struck down, but a Nebraska law which prohibited the use of any language but English in public school instruction. The Nebraska law was struck down by the United State Supreme Court in 1923. Governor Harding's edict, by implication and close association with the content of the Nebraska law, was struck down by the United States Supreme Court.

—Mary K. Fredericksen

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